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"CAPTAIN TRAFFORD, AT YOUR SERVICE, MISS WARD!"

## A TERRIBLE MUDDLE

NOVELLETTE.  
(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

### CHAPTER I.

**T**HEY had been engaged for years, and yet no one knew exactly when they were to be married. It was generally known that they were "appropriated," but as their abodes were far distant, and they never visited each other, their respective friends might be forgiven for not taking very much interest in the affair, and regarding it as rather in the clouds.

"Trafford's an awfully good fellow," some officer in the Captain's regiment would remark to a feminine friend. "He's engaged to someone in England; hasn't seen her for

years, but he manages to keep pretty cheerful considering. I should say his heart wasn't particularly in the affair."

So much for one side. Regarding the other, Alice Amalie was a very pretty little girl, but her fortune was limited to a hundred a-year, and the indulgent aunt with whom she lived owed her comforts to a very handsome annuity, which, as it died with her, left her powerless to provide for her darling, and made her view the engagement with rather favourable eyes.

"Dull, Alice!" she would exclaim, if the child ventured to complain of the monotony of her lot. "Why, I am sure you wouldn't wish to be going to all sorts of gaieties while Captain Trafford is abroad. A young lady whose fiancée is away should always keep herself in as much seclusion as possible."

Whereupon Alice pouted, and asked if Mrs. Ward wouldn't like to shut her up in a convent; or, if in a specially mutinous mood, she

would inquire, gravely, whether her aunt supposed Captain Trafford kept himself in seclusion, considering his regiment was at one of the gayest stations in India.

"It's quite absurd, you know, Aunt Dorothy," the naughty child would conclude, "for I don't believe Jim means to marry me at all. It's eight years since he went abroad, and I believe he is as tired of the whole affair as I am."

"It was your father's wish," began Mrs. Ward, sententiously. Truth to say, she found it hard to forgive her dead brother for thus disposing of his only child; but in public she always stood up for respect being paid to the dead man's wishes. "You know, Alice, he had the highest opinion of all the Traffords."

"It wasn't that," explained Alice, who had a painful love of frankness. "Sir Edmund Trafford had a law-suit with my grandfather, the loss of which nearly ruined him, and made

mamma, instead of an heiress, nothing but a penniless girl with a long pedigree, and the old man seems to have repented on his deathbed, and charged his son with making restitution. Sir Richard wrote to my father, and they agreed to bury the hatchet. Instead of any part of the property changing hands, they entered into a solemn league and covenant that some day or other I should marry Jim."

"My child, whoever told you this?"

"I don't know," said Alice, simply. "I seem always to have known it. Perhaps dad told me something himself; perhaps I picked it up from the servants. Mamma was dead, so I was the only representative of the Vernons. That was one reason, I suppose, for Sir Richard had promised his father to 'do something,' and perhaps he thought letting me marry his heir and share the property was the best thing he could do."

"If only you had been a boy!" sighed her aunt.

"Why, then, I should have been Sir Somebody Ainslie, and a very rich man; but, you see, the fates were against me, and I am just a poor orphan girl."

"Do you remember Captain Trafford?"

"I—I think so. He was a rough-looking boy, with a shock of curly hair. He was twenty, and I was eleven, when he came to Ainslie Grange to ratify the agreement. Sir Richard was there too. I liked him better than his son. He seemed so sorry for me because I couldn't inherit the Grange. I remember he told Jim I had lost one fortune through being a girl, and it would be cruelly unjust if he robbed me of another. Jim just nodded (he had a shaggy head like a Newfoundland dog's), and muttered 'All right,' and then they made us shake hands, and it was all over."

"And you have never seen him since?"

"I saw him a year afterwards, when dad died. Sir Richard and Jim came to the funeral. I think he said he was sorry for me, but I can't remember. Sir Richard wanted to take me home with him, but the will said I was to go to Aunt Dorothy, so my things were packed up, and my nurse brought me to me in Devonshire, and, soon after, we heard Jim had gone to India."

Mrs. Ward looked very thoughtful. She had settled in a quiet Kentish town not very long after Alice came to her.

Sir Richard wrote once a year, always asking for news of Miss Ainslie, but he never invited the girl to go and stay with him.

Mrs. Ward was a practical woman, though a very affectionate one. That to marry Jim, and become in time Lady Trafford, mistress of Castle Vernon and a princely fortune, was a grand match for her darling she saw perfectly. As the grandchild of the last Lord Vernon, there seemed a kind of retributive justice in the arrangement; but, on the other hand, the widow thought Captain Trafford rather a laggard in love, and did not at all approve of the lack of fervour in his wooing.

"I am twenty years old," remarked Miss Ainslie, simply, "and I have been engaged nearly half my life. Don't you think, Aunt Dorothy, I must be remarkable?"

"My dear, don't jest. Love and marriage are far too serious things to be laughed at!"

"But I wasn't laughing," protested Alice; "and I don't think, Aunt, there is much love in the matter. I never cared about Jim; he was such a great rough boy. Of the two I liked Sir Richard much better."

Mrs. Ward sighed.

"I am so inexperienced," she said, frankly. "You see, Alice, I had no girls of my own, and I don't know what is customary."

"I don't think," suggested her niece, quietly. "there can be anything 'customary' in the matter, for I hope few girls have a fate like mine!"

"Shall I write to Sir Richard, and tell him you are grown up?"

"Aunt Dorothy, you make my hair stand on end at the bare idea. Why, it would be like

asking Sir Richard to order his son to come home and marry me!"

"But, my dear, he may have forgotten the flight of time."

"Jim hasn't forgotten," said Alice, severely. "He must remember his own age, and I am just nine years younger!"

"Goodness! Then Captain Trafford must be twenty-nine?"

"He goes with the year," remarked Alice. "He will be thirty on New Year's Day!"

Aunt Dorothy's handsome, well-built house looked particularly cheerful in winter. She was a lady who studied comfort. The blazing fire, the rich, warm curtains, even the bright ruby dress of her pretty niece, seemed peculiarly inviting when the air was so keenly frosty, and the sky so grey and lowering.

Alice Ainslie was remarkably pretty, and though the fact of her engagement made Mrs. Ward keep her as much as possible in the background, yet she could not be treated quite like a child, and there were one or two men already very envious of the absent fiancée whom no one knew.

Alice was not in the least like the usual idea of a poorly-provided-for orphan. The first ten years of her life had been spent in luxury, for the Ainslies were a wealthy race.

Though title and fortune went to a distant male heir, Mrs. Ward was rich enough to make the child feel very little difference in her new home.

Alice was everyone's first thought and chief consideration. Had she not possessed one of the sweetest tempers ever known, she would certainly have been spoilt.

As it was, she had grown up a frank, unaffected girl, with the utter fearlessness of one who was used to nothing but kindness. She was not in the least sentimental; at any rate, she thought not, which came to much the same thing.

Mrs. Ward looked at her niece rather anxiously, as Alice sat on the thick fur rug nursing a Persian kitten.

As she said herself, the aunt was not experienced in the ways of girls; but this much she did know—she could not keep her pet much longer in the background.

Last Christmas a rather serious illness had made her a prisoner indoors all through the winter months. The year before she had been in deep mourning, and prior to that she had refused all invitations on the ground that Alice was not "out."

But at twenty she could not decline to let her darling mix in such gaieties as were to be had.

Christmas was a very festive time at Kingsleigh, and Alice would certainly have the chance of two or three balls, not to mention half-a-dozen carpet dances, and numerous social evenings.

What in the world was to be done? She might remind every hostess of Miss Ainslie's engagement, just as a precautionary act; but it seemed to her to do so was just a little humiliating.

She was so proud of Alice she did not like to confess the girl's fiancée had not seen her for eight years.

Miss Ainslie herself guessed something of what was passing in her aunt's mind, for, suddenly putting down the kitten, she crossed to Mrs. Ward's side and kissed her.

"Don't worry," she said, coaxingly.

"My dear child!"

"You are puckering up your forehead into all kinds of wrinkles," declared Alice, wickedly. "I believe you are making yourself quite miserable because you think Jim slighted me—"

"I am naturally anxious," began Mrs. Ward, but Alice interrupted her.

"Please don't be," she said, cheerfully. "I shall be twenty-one next summer, and then I mean to break off the engagement!"

"Alice!"

Alice nodded her little head triumphantly.

"I can't do anything now," she said, with a little sigh, "because Jim might fancy it was out of pique, or because I was vexed at his indifference; but the moment I am of age I shall write and give Captain Trafford his freedom!"

"And then—"

"Well," said Alice, slowly, "you and I will be very happy together, and forget all about weddings and engagements; and perhaps some day we may meet Sir Richard Trafford, and if Jim is comfortably married we might be very friendly. I always liked Sir Richard."

She was very pretty, this dainty girl, whose fate was, as she expressed it, "remarkable." Alice Ainslie did not look in the least a fiancée to be neglected. She was small and slight in figure, she had masses of soft brown hair, her eyes were large, dark blue, their depths almost as dark as purple pansies. She had the clear, fresh complexion of youth and good health alone can give, while, in contrast to her fair hair and delicate, creamy skin, her eyebrows and lashes were almost black, which gave a strange, piquant charm to the sweet face.

She had lived with Mrs. Ward for eight years, during which that lady had provided for her every want, leaving the interest of Alice's little fortune to accumulate, so that the principal was quite half as much again as it had been at the time of her father's death. Mrs. Ward never denied her favourite anything, her idea being it was better for the child to enjoy the comforts money buys than to save up for a future when she would probably be a rich man's wife.

Alice wore a charming dress of ruby cashmere, trimmed with fur; a gold watch and chain; a large gold solitaire fastened her collar, and smaller ones adorned her cuffs. Her pretty hands were quite bare, save that on the engagement finger she wore a hoop of diamonds which Sir Richard Trafford had purchased for his son's betrothal ring. This gem had been the source of great anxiety to good Aunt Dorothy. It was only within the last year that she had considered Alice old enough to wear it, and even now the careless way in which the young lady treated it was a continual worry to her guardian.

"Lady Trafford is dead, I think," said Mrs. Ward, who seemed to take a mournful pleasure in discussing the topic of Alice's engagement.

"She died when Jim was a baby," replied Miss Ainslie. "There are ever so many girls at least"—naively—"I suppose they wouldn't be girls exactly by now, since Jim is nearly thirty, and he is the youngest of the family."

"And where do they live?"

"Where mother and all the dead and gone Vernons were born," retorted Alice. "It does seem a shame, but I believe they proved their claim to it."

"I suppose if Sir Richard was dead we should hear."

"Of course we should," said Alice, cheerfully. "And why should he die, dear old man? He can't be much over seventy even now."

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Ward, as though she felt her remark would be unwelcome, "you may not have noticed it, my dear, but Sir Richard usually writes so very punctually on the first of October."

"So he does—and this is the tenth. Never mind, aunt. Perhaps he went pheasant-shooting instead."

But, though she gave no sign of annoyance, Miss Ainslie was really far more annoyed than her aunt dreamed of. Alice had not the slightest desire to be married; she was very happy as she was, and she did not entertain at all a flattering remembrance of the rough boy with a head like a Newfoundland dog's; but all the same, she was proud, and did not like to be slighted with impunity. If Captain Trafford was tired of the engagement, let it be broken off, and she should be rather relieved than otherwise, but she was in no mood to play Juliet to such a very faithless Romeo.

Mrs. Ward did not go out that afternoon, but Alice drove her pretty pony into Bromley, the nearest market town, and stopped at the post-office, where she obtained a great deal of useful information—namely, that the mail for India left London every Friday, and letters took about eighteen days in transit via Bradfield, but it was advisable to allow a little longer time in making calculations for any inland place.

"Which means," reflected Alice, "that I might get an answer in six weeks, but that it would be more prudent not to expect one under seven. This is Wednesday, so if I write to-morrow I shall be in ample time. I shall not say a word to Aunt Dorothy; she might wish to assist in the composition of my letter; and though it won't be precisely a love-letter, I think I would rather write it alone."

No, it was not a love-letter. Alice Ainslie utterly forgot, as she sat down to her self-appointed task, that James Trafford, like herself, had been more a passive agent than an active partner in the contract she wished to break.

Only eleven years old at the time, she could not understand that Jim had yielded to his father's wishes only because the latter declared it was a point of honour, and that the "rough boy" had frankly said he would far rather restore the Vernon property to Miss Ainslie than barter away his liberty. She did not know that her father had made it a special stipulation that she and her betrothed should not grow up on terms of friendly intimacy, because he feared in that case her feeling for Jim would only be a sisterly affection, and she could not possibly guess that it had been settled between Sir Richard and his friend that she should not be married until she was turned twenty, and that Jim should not renew his acquaintance with her until she was within six months of that age. Her girlish vanity was disappointed by Jim's neglect. Her old childish love for Sir Richard was chilled by his stiff, formal letters, or she would never have indited the extraordinary epistle which was the young Captain's first letter from his fiancee.

"Dear Sir,—It is a very long time since I saw you, and I am a great deal older and wiser than when we agreed to that foolish arrangement at Ainslie Grange. I have not the slightest wish to marry you, and I am quite sure you can find someone much better suited to you than I am. I don't believe in love and marriage, and all that kind of sentimental rubbish."

"I have received a good education, and my aunt says I am a very practical young woman. I am very tired of England and the quiet country place where we live. I want to go about and see the world, but my aunt declares you would not like it, and that she must consider your wishes."

"I shall esteem it a favour, therefore, if you will kindly acknowledge this letter, and resign all pretensions to meddle in my concerns. I offer you your freedom, and I request my own. I am quite sure we should not get on together, as I am quite an independent woman, and wish to devote myself to the cause, believing in those rights, and I have the courage of my opinions."

"You need not think yourself bound to offer me any part of the Vernon property as a sort of compensation, for I have enough to live on, and I am not at all extravagant."

"Trusting you will give this letter your earliest attention—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

"ALICE MARY AINSLIE."

"That will do beautifully," reflected the girl, as she fastened the letter and directed it—Sir Richard's last communication had mentioned where his son was stationed. "I am sure he won't want to have anything to say to me after that. I have said quite enough to make him think me horrible. Now he will get my letter in three weeks, and I think I ought to have an answer by the 26th of November! It was ridiculous going on as we were, and far better to have an understanding."

I wonder what he will think when he reads it? Probably that I am a most objectionable young woman, and he is remarkably fortunate to be rid of me."

## CHAPTER II.

Castle Vernon was a beautiful estate in Yorkshire, not twenty miles from Ainslie Grange, and a very warm friendship existed between Sir Richard Trafford and Sir Thomas Ainslie, though the latter was many years the younger of the two, being, in fact, not much over forty, while Sir Richard had passed his allotted three score and ten.

The famous law-suit of *Trafford v. Vernon* had been fought honourably on both sides. Everything hinged on a question of entail—whether a dead and gone Lord Vernon had had the power to disinherit his daughter and only child, who had married the father of Sir Edmund Trafford, the plaintiff in the celebrated case.

It almost ruined Lord Vernon. Some ill-advised speculations completed his overthrow, and he died well-nigh penniless, his only consolation being that his only child was engaged to the master of Ainslie Grange.

That was more than twenty years ago. Sir Richard ruled now in his father's place, and Sir Thomas Ainslie, a distant cousin of the late baronet, was his close friend, while pleasant, kind-hearted Lady Ainslie was the intimate associate of the Miss Traffords, three of whom still lingered in the paternal nest.

"I have been thinking," she said to Mabel, the châtelaine of Castle Vernon, "I should like to ask Alice Ainslie here for Christmas."

Miss Trafford started. She was quite aware of her brother's tacit engagement, and heartily disapproved of it.

She judged the unknown Alice with the peculiarly harsh criticism of thirty-nine, and was not at all disposed to see her at the Grange, fisted and made much of.

"I wouldn't if I were you," she said, gravely. "You see, Jim will be home for Christmas, and it might make things so uncomfortable."

"My dear girl," said Mabel Ainslie, laughing. "I am very fond of Jim, but I utterly deny his right to choose my guest. He has been engaged to my little cousin for nine years, and it seems to me, directly he comes to England, he ought to see her. He can't expect the child to 'wait' for him all the best years of her life. The engagement ought to be fulfilled or broken off. For either course he needs to see Alice, and I think myself they would meet far more comfortably here than at Castle Vernon."

"I certainly shall not invite Miss Ainslie to Castle Vernon," said Mabel, sharply. "I don't at all approve of the connection. With Jim's prospects, he ought to marry someone far different to a penniless orphan."

"I don't think Jim need complain," said Lady Ainslie, calmly. "Of course, Sir Thomas will give his kinswoman a handsome portion, and—some day she will be mistress here."

Miss Trafford stared.

"I thought the property was entailed."

"So it is. A hundred years ago a certain Sir Gerald Ainslie entailed it on the heirs male of his only son George, thus cutting off all collateral branches. George Ainslie had two sons. The elder, John, was the great grandfather of Alice Ainslie, while my husband is the grandson of the younger. The Ainslies don't seem to have been a prolific race. Sir Gerald's son George had two children, but none of their descendants had more than one. Alice Ainslie is the last representative of the elder son, and my husband of the younger, so that—"

"Please don't," said Mabel Trafford, her tone full of real sympathy for she was really fond of Mabel, and knew that the three little graves in Ainslie churchyard were an ever-present grief to her—"please don't! I see what you mean. There being no male Ainslie, some day Alice must be Sir Thomas's

heir. I wonder you don't hate her for standing in your children's place."

"It is not her fault," said Mabel, half-dreamily, "and my little ones are beyond the need of earthly homes. I have always felt a strong interest in Alice Ainslie."

"And I never have."

"When I came here first, and saw all she had lost through being a girl, I felt I should have liked to have her here and bring her up with our children; but my husband said she was adopted by her aunt, Sir Hugh's half-sister, and that, Mrs. Ward being childless, it would be cruel to take Alice away from her."

"Papa writes to Mrs. Ward once a year. He wanted to ask her and Alice to the Castle, but, of course, I wouldn't hear of it."

Lady Ainslie opened her eyes.

"Don't you care at all for your brother's happiness, Mabel?"

"So much that I want to see him freed from this foolish entanglement."

"You think Jim might do better than wed the heiress of Ainslie?"

"I hope she won't be the heiress of Ainslie," said Mabel, bluntly. "and I think a man should choose his wife for himself."

"When does Jim come home?"

"The beginning of December. Minnie and the children are coming to us for the Christmas, on purpose to see him. Minnie was always his favourite sister."

"Well, I won't promise you not to ask Alice," said Lady Ainslie, gravely, "for I think it would be a very good opportunity for them to meet. I shall see what Sir Thomas says."

Sir Thomas's decision was prompt.

"My dear," he said, kindly, "remember she is just the age of our Barbara. Could you bear it?"

"She has no mother, Tom, and I feel I should like to know her."

"Then ask her by all means," said Sir Thomas, warmly. "I have always felt an interest in Hugh's orphan girl, and, though I have a warm regard for old Trafford, I do think he's gone just the way to make her and his son wretched."

"Jim's a fine fellow," said Lady Ainslie, who had seen a great deal of him in the first year of her residence at the Grange, before he went out to India.

"Yes, but a trifle hard. He would be a devoted husband if he married for love, but I rather doubt his making a girl happy whom he was coerced into wedded."

"I think Mabel is hard on her."

"Minnie won't be," returned Tom, cheerfully. "Depend upon it, Alice Ainslie will find at least one friend in her fiancé's family. Minnie will make pet of her, and, as she is Jim's favourite sister, it is a good thing."

Meanwhile, at Kingsleigh, Alice Ainslie was awaiting, with what patience she could muster, Captain Trafford's answer to her letter. It cost her a great deal to keep her secret from her aunt, for events happened which made the Traffords and Alice's engagement Mrs. Ward's favourite theme of conversation, and the girl was enormously tempted to confess that probably by this time Jim was rejoicing at his release.

Lady Ainslie wrote about the middle of November, both to Mrs. Ward and Alice. She did not touch upon the question of the girl's future inheritance, but she said both Sir Thomas and herself were anxious to make acquaintance with their young kinswoman. The Grange was within easy distance of Castle Vernon, and if Alice became her guest it would be a favourable opportunity for her making acquaintance with her future relations, as her husband and herself were very intimate with the Traffords. In conclusion, the kind-hearted woman begged for Alice on a long visit, and, while warmly inviting Mrs. Ward to accompany her niece, she yet promised to take every care of Alice if she came to Yorkshire alone.

"You must go, dear," was Mrs. Ward's decision. "It would be graceless to refuse."

"I should like to see the Grange again," said Alice, dreamily, "and cousin Kate writes as though she would be kind."

"And it would be such an advantage to you, dear, to make the Traffords' acquaintance."

"If the Traffords want me they can invite me," said Alice, wrathfully. "I can assure you I am not anxious to see them. I hope Cousin Kate won't make me go there every day."

And so it came about that Lady Ainslie's invitation was accepted; but Alice, who had a strange aversion to going to Yorkshire before she had received an answer from Jim Trafford, insisted that the date of her visit should be left an open question.

Miss Ainslie was still in the agonies of suspense. She had begun to count the days, and almost the hours, which must elapse before she heard from Captain Trafford.

She was almost weary of speculating what he would say to her letter, when an event happened which quite changed the current of her thoughts.

Nelly Fortescue, an old friend whom she had known ever since she came to live with her aunt, arrived at Foxgrove Lodge on a visit, and Alice, who was genuinely kind-hearted, was struck with pity at the girl's thin face and hectic cheeks.

Nelly was an orphan like herself, but she had no kind, indulgent aunt to fill her parents' place.

When her father died, some friends found her a situation as nursery governess, and there she had been for two years without a holiday, until her strength breaking down, she was sent away as "not up to her duties," and, but for Mrs. Ward's kindly hospitality, there would have been nothing before her but the convalescent home, for which her late employer was generous (?) enough to offer her a ticket.

"I think Mrs. Fuller ought to be tried for manslaughter!" said Alice, angrily, to her aunt. "She has nearly killed poor Nelly!"

"I want Nelly to stay with us six months, but she has set her heart on leaving on the first of December."

"Whatever for?"

"Why, it seems a friend of her late employer has offered to engage her as a kind of companion-governess, but she cannot wait for her after that date. I have told Nelly a month's longer rest might set her up for life, but I cannot get her to listen to me. She says she knows Mrs. Macgregor would be kind to her."

Nelly said as much herself to Alice.

"I know I am not strong enough, but I can't ask her to wait. She is so kind and good, I would rather have her situation than a nobleman's; but I can't expect her to keep it open for me."

"Why not?"

"Because she is going into the country on the first of December, to stay at her father's, and she can't go there with the children unless she has a governess."

"Let her get someone just for a month."

Nelly shook her head.

"The time's so short, and she might not find anyone willing to put themselves out of the way just for a month; besides—Alice—I hope I'm not getting jealous—if she met someone very nice, perhaps she might like her better than me, and not want me at all!"

"Look here, Nell," said Alice Ainslie, with the determined air of one used to her own way, "you are not going to kill yourself for any Mrs. Macgregor on earth. If there is no other way of making you stay here quietly to rest, why, I'll go to Mrs. Macgregor myself!"

"You!"

"Well, I flatter myself I know enough to teach children of eight or nine," said Alice, mischievously, "and I am not at all a bad companion. Then, as Aunt Dorothy certainly couldn't spare me for so long, you might be quite sure I wouldn't steal your situation permanently."

"It is just like you to think of it; but Mrs. Ward would never consent; and, Alice—I don't

quite like to tell you—Mrs. Macgregor is Sir Richard Trafford's daughter, and I was to join her at Castle Vernon!"

"Well," said Alice, with unconquerable calm, "what does that matter? I have never set eyes on Sir Richard's daughter, and he wouldn't recognise me after nine years. Of course, I couldn't call myself Ainslie, but except for that I see no difficulty."

"But Mrs. Ward will; and, Alice, Captain Trafford is coming home, and it wouldn't be nice for you."

Alice went straight to her aunt and detailed her scheme. Mrs. Ward's objections were quite as strong as Nelly had expected.

"My dear child, it can't be. Captain Trafford would have every right to be displeased!"

"Bother Captain Trafford!"

"Alice!"

"Well, I can't help it," groaned Miss Ainslie; "for the last nine years his name has been a perpetual bugbear to me!"

"If it had been any other family," said Mrs. Ward, "for Nelly's sake I might have consented."

"Marriage is a very serious thing," began Alice, gravely. "It is very rash to take a husband of whom you know nothing."

Mrs. Ward fell into the trap at once.

"Very. That is why I am so thankful for Lady Ainslie's invitation. It will give you every chance of becoming better acquainted with Captain Trafford."

"In his father's house I should see him every day," rejoined Alice, artfully. "I could judge of his temper and disposition thoroughly by his behaviour to his little nieces' governess."

"My dear, it would involve you in endless difficulties. How could you go on to Ainslie Grange after you had met Lady Ainslie as a governess?"

"I shouldn't mind. If Cousin Kate was nice, I should tell her everything, and why I did it."

The doctor played unconsciously into Alice's hands when he came to see Nelly the next day. He told Mrs. Ward plainly the girl was consumptive, and that to go to Yorkshire in the winter would shorten her life.

"If she stays with you till after Christmas, and her health improves, as I expect, there is no reason why she should not join Mrs. Macgregor at Hastings, and enter on her duties; but to begin work now, in her weak state, and to spend December and January in the bleakest part of Yorkshire, is just suicide."

"You see," said Alice, gravely, to Mrs. Ward, when they discussed the matter, "to live at Hastings would be such a boon to Nelly, and Mrs. Macgregor lives there all the year round. If only this unlucky visit to Castle Vernon could be got off, it would be an ideal situation for her."

"I will never hear of you taking her place," said Mrs. Ward, with the vehemence of a warrior who feels the ground slipping under his feet.

"Then Nelly will go herself, and shorten her life. Aunt Dorothy, can't you trust me to treat the Traffords with becoming courtesy? Don't you think I should be good to the children?"

"I call it a mad scheme."

"But you will give in? You wouldn't like by-and-by to feel that we had helped to shorten Nelly's life."

"My dear child," cried Aunt Dorothy, fairly conquered, "have your own way, only don't blame me if harm comes of it. And, Alice, dear, it troubles me to think of your spending your Christmas shut up in a nursery, you who have always had so much liberty."

"A little work will be good for me," cried Alice. "You dear old aunty, I thought you wouldn't stand out. Now I am going to tell Nelly she had better write to Mrs. Macgregor to-day, and date the letter from Dr. Fergy's, then Jim's sister won't think her governess is staying near his fiancée; and I shall write to Cousin Kate and ask her to have me after Christmas instead of before."

Miss Ainslie was capable of much better letter-writing than the specimen she had sent to her lover.

She indited a very pretty note to Lady Ainslie, saying she was very sorry unforeseen circumstances prevented her coming to the Grange until the middle of January.

"Aunt Dorothy says you will think me very rude," concluded Alice, "but I have a very old friend staying with us who is ill, and it is for her sake I want to defer my visit to you. Please write and say I may come in January, for, indeed, I have been looking forward to seeing you and Sir Thomas very much, and I always love the Grange for my father's sake."

"I am sure she is a dear little thing," said Lady Ainslie to her husband, as she read the note, "but I wish she could have come for Christmas. The sooner she and Jim get their first meeting over the better; but, of course, I shall tell her to come in January."

Mrs. Macgregor answered Nell Fortescue's letter by return of post. She said she was afraid her young friend had been seriously overworked at Mrs. Fuller's, and she was sure she needed a longer rest. She was quite willing to receive Miss Ward as her substitute for a month, or even longer. The children were so young that accomplishments did not matter; but Miss Fortescue must assure her of two things before she finally consented to the plan proposed—first, that Miss Ward was good-tempered; second, that she was a gentlewoman.

Presumably Nelly's reply was satisfactory, for Mrs. Macgregor wrote next to Alice herself. She gave her rather exhaustive directions for reaching Castle Vernon, and begged that she would arrive there on the first of December.

She promised payment at the rate of three guineas a month, and assured her governess-elect she might depend upon being treated with every possible kindness and consideration.

"While, if I am satisfied with you, I will do my utmost to procure you another situation when Miss Fortescue is well enough to come to me," was the lady's promise, at which Alice smiled a little, quietly wondering what Mrs. Macgregor would say could she only know her correspondent had once aspired to be her sister-in-law.

### CHAPTER III.

"I wouldn't tell one of the others, Minnie, but you and I always confided our woes to each other. Just read this letter, and tell me what you think of it."

It was the day after Captain Trafford had landed in England, and he was spending the evening with Mrs. Macgregor at the hotel.

Minnie's husband was in the Navy, and during his compulsory absences she lived with her little ones at Hastings.

She had come up to sleep one night in London to break the long journey to Yorkshire. Perhaps she was glad that it gave her the chance of a long tête-à-tête with her favourite friend, her only brother.

"Jim," and she read poor Alice's effusion with flashing eyes, "she must be horrid!"

"Only a trifle strong-minded. I was disgusted when I read the letter first, but, on reflection, I'm not sure but what the girl has something to complain of."

"What?"

"Well, you know, I suppose the engagement has been rather a nuisance to her. If she is a woman's rights champion, she must have been awfully handicapped by feeling she was bound some day to marry one of those objectionable animals—men."

"Jim, I don't think you ought to jest about it."

"The oddest part of it is, Minnie, that I was actually surprised."

"Anyone would be surprised," agreed Minnie.

"You see, she was such a child when I saw her last, and, never hearing anything about her, I never realised she was growing up. I

had a letter from the governor by the same mail as hers, saying she was twenty turned, and it was time something was settled, and, somehow, I rather liked the idea (I hadn't read her letter then, you see), she was such a pretty little girl, and I was so fond of her in those old days!"

"My dear Jim"—there was real sympathy in Minnie's voice now—"do you mean you have been in love with her all these years? You can't have seen her since she was a child!"

"I saw her at the funeral last. She looked such a mite in her black frock, and she had cried till her face was as white as marble, and her eyes seemed too big for it. I hardly spoke to her there, but I have never forgotten her. I think, Minnie, I have been more loyal to that child than many men are to the fiancées they have chosen of their own will. I never thought of a home of my own without thinking of Alice. I never gave a thought of love to any other woman. It always seemed to me that little girl was waiting for me!"

Minnie was crying heartily.

"I can't help it," she sobbed; "you are so disappointed; and if Alice was such a dear little girl, it must be all her aunt's fault that she has grown up so horrid."

"So strong-minded," corrected Jim.

"What answer have you sent to her letter?"

"I wrote and told her I would not take her dismissal until I had seen her. I offered to go to Foxgrove Lodge directly after Christmas, but she replies she will be at Ainslie Grange in January, and that if a meeting between us is absolutely necessary she would rather it took place there."

"Poor old Jim! So you've got the anticipation to worry you for weeks."

"It will be a disappointment to the government."

"Terrible. He was so fond of Alice as a child. He has built so many hopes on your union. Shall you tell him?"

"There is no occasion to say anything except that Miss Ainslie has fixed January for our meeting. Perhaps, when we see her, we shall understand better. The disciples of woman's rights carry their theories into dress, don't they?"

"Of course they do. They are simply hideous dowdies—at least, most of them are—and they talk of the Cause (with a capital C), and scold men in general."

"Then perhaps we may trust to Miss Ainslie to disenchant Sir Richard," said Jim, hopefully. "And now, Minnie, tell me about yourself. I suppose Macgregor is still at the Antipodes?"

"He will be home in March. The chicks and I are going to Castle Vernon to-morrow."

"To-morrow! I thought it was December."

"We all made a mistake in the almanac. I talked of the first of December, which, of course, is a Sunday, and Mabel took me to mean Saturday, while my governess construed it into Monday. However, I daresay she will be glad of another Sunday at home, and nurse and I can manage for two days."

"Surely the children are too young for lessons," said their uncle, laughing. "Don't make your daughters into prodigies, Minnie."

"There's no fear of that! Perhaps they might have gone a little longer without a governess, only, you see, since Charley's niece married last August I have been so dreadfully lonely. A sailor's wife needs some sort of companion if her children are young, just to keep her from anxious fears every time the wind blows high."

Jim understood.

"I see, you missed your niece so much that you are trying to replace her by a lady-companion, who shall combine that post with the one of governess to the little girls."

"Something like it. You know, Jim, father always wanted me to live at home; but I want a house of my own, so that Charley and I may have as much time together when he is on shore. Mabel and I never understood each

other well, and since I have been a married woman I feel her yoke rather irksome."

"And the Macgregors do you see much of them? Are they friendly?"

"Very. The old Squire is most anxious that Charley should retire and settle near them in Scotland; but my husband loves his profession, and it's ill-luck waiting for dead men's shoes. Now, Jim, tell me plainly, what do you mean to do?"

"Do!" repeated Captain Trafford, in a perplexed tone. "What do you mean, Minnie? I have a year's leave. I must stay in Yorkshire until I have seen Miss Ainslie, and broken the rupture of our engagement to my father. I will come and stay with you at Hastings later on, if you like."

"Of course I like. But that isn't what I mean. Shall you go back to India?"

"Why not?"

"Because you are father's only son, and he has set his heart on having you near him in his declining years. He is seventy-five, Jim; it can't be long before you are master of Castle Vernon. I think you might grant his wish."

Jim looked troubled.

"I always meant to leave the service when I married. I thought that Alice and I should settle somewhere near the Castle. I share your dislike of living in a home ruled by Mabel; but, of course, that is all at an end."

Mrs. Macgregor's reflection, as she bid her brother good-night, was that Alice Ainslie had a great deal to answer for.

Captain Trafford did not feel particularly cheerful when Monday came. He loved his father dearly, but his affections were chiefly centered on Sir Richard and Mrs. Macgregor. There was little real sympathy between him and the three unmarried sisters, who were all more or less on the shelf, since Mabel was verging on forty, and Jane and Maria only two or three years younger.

It came into the young soldier's head as he drove to King's Cross that few people in the world were so utterly lonely as himself. His father was proud of him, Minnie loved him, but he was absolutely necessary to no human creature. If only things had gone differently with his ill-starred engagement, Alice Ainslie, would have had no cause for jealousy; popular alike with men and women, Jim admitted very few to his intimacy. If ever he loved, he would love with every fibre of his honest heart; and in spite of the years since they parted, he had never felt a warmer feeling for any woman than the affectionate regard he had for his old playfellow.

He was rather late on reaching King's Cross. Then he never hurried himself, and actually stayed a minute or two at the bookstall, to the despair of the porter who was carrying his rugs and bag. That worthy was powerless to choose a seat for the liberal-looking gentleman, for the steam was up, the whistle had sounded; all he could do was to bundle Jim and his things after him into the nearest first-class carriage, with the reflection that, as the train didn't stop till Grantham, the belated passenger would have to make the best of his surroundings for the next two hours.

They were off before Jim had well sat down. He unfastened his rugs, and spread one leisurely over his knees, he put his bag in the rack, cut his newspaper leisurely enough, and cursed the tardiness which had deprived him of a seat in a smoking-carriage, before he troubled himself at all respecting his fellow-passenger. He had seen as he entered—or, rather, was pushed into—the carriage—that something feminine was in the far corner, but they had left all the suburban region behind, and were steaming through the pretty country beyond Barnet, before he even glanced in her direction, and then he saw that his companion was a young lady (so young, in fact, that he almost marvelled at her being trusted on a long journey by herself), whose face, though not absolutely sorrowful, had such a grave, thoughtful expression, such an earnest look,

that he would have staked a great deal her expedition was not one of pleasure.

The vibration of the train, now going at express speed, knocked a small parcel out of the rack, and it fell almost on Jim's feet. He restored it to her with a smile, and a hope it was not injured by the accident; and as she thanked him in a clear, musical voice, he had, for the first time, a good view of her face.

His first impression was correct. She looked a mere child—perhaps seventeen; she had masses of golden-brown hair, and a pair of dark pansy-blue eyes. She accepted his little service with simple courtesy, and neither giggled like an ill-bred schoolgirl, or frowned like a prude who resents a strange gentleman's civility as a deadly wrong. She was quite dignified in her simplicity, but not discourteous. She had certainly, Jim decided, been used to receive respectful attentions, and he wondered more and more who she could be and where she was going.

Dress, which is never much of a help to the masculine mind, in this instance afforded less clue than ever, for the girl was clothed from head to foot in a long tailor-made ulster of the darkest ruby cloth, and she wore a soft travelling-cap to match. The attire was most becoming, but Jim, who had no experience of the pretences of ladies' tailors, thought it a most unpretentious get-up. The little grey muff and tiny leather hand-bag told no tales, and beyond that she was travelling first-class there was nothing to denote her social status; and this last clue was no clue at all in an age when gentlemen's families are content to ride third-class, and nouveaux riches indulge in Pullman's cars.

The paper was exhausted. They were still a good way off Grantham, when it began to snow, and Jim, who had been watching his companion attentively, saw that she was decidedly troubled by the change in the weather.

"Won't you let me lend you a rug?" he ventured to ask, as she drew up the collar of her ulster, and shivered just a little. "I am afraid we are in for a storm, and it will get colder and colder."

She accepted the rug with a graceful word of thanks. She seemed so used to being taken care of that Jim wondered again and again what her friends had been thinking of to let her start on a long, solitary journey on such a day.

"We shall be at Grantham in half-an-hour, and I can get you a foot-warmer there if you are going farther."

"I am going ever so much farther," said the girl, with a frank smile, "and I shall be very glad of a foot-warmer. Aunty and I were in such a hurry at King's Cross that we never thought of getting one."

"There are sure to be some at Grantham. You do not look used to travelling alone."

"I have never been on a journey by myself in my life before," she confessed; "but," with a charming smile, "everyone has to make a beginning, I suppose."

"If I can be of any use to you, I hope you will let me know," he said, kindly. "I have been away from England a great many years, but I used to know the line very well. Are you going through to the North, or do you change anywhere?"

"I am going to a place called Clarenceton, in Yorkshire, and I have to change at York and Northallerton."

Captain Trafford looked at her in surprise.

"Then we shall be fellow-travellers for a good while longer. I, too, am going to Clarenceton."

He felt that she looked at him rather more scrutinisingly than she had done before, but she only said, gravely—

"I am afraid it will be very tiresome if it snows. I have to go some miles beyond Clarenceton, and perhaps there will be no cabs."

Jim smiled.

"I don't think Clarenceton ever boasted a cab. But pray don't be alarmed; your friends are sure to come and meet you. Yorkshire

people are most hospitable, and would never let a guest arrive to find herself unwelcomed."

"But I am not a guest," said the girl, quietly. "I am going to Clarenceton as a governess, so, of course, no one will trouble."

Captain Trafford looked at her in renewed surprise.

"Is it possible that you are Miss Ward, and that you are going to Castle Vernon?" he asked, eagerly.

"I am Mrs. Macgregor's governess. I—"

"I am her brother," interrupted Jim. "Captain Trafford, at your service, Miss Ward, and I hope you will let me constitute myself your escort for the rest of this journey."

She grew first rosy-red, then deadly pale. She was prettier even than he had thought at first. Poor little thing! Perhaps she had never been out into the world before, and was afraid of her employer.

"Have you seen my sister?" he asked, kindly. "No? Then I think you will like her very much. She is quite young, but she has a motherly way, and she is very fond of petting people, especially girls."

Miss Ward recovered her self-possession by an effort.

"I shall do my best to give Mrs. Macgregor satisfaction," she said, rather stiffly. "Little children generally take to me, so I hope your nieces will, Captain Trafford."

She spoke the name quite naturally. She was quite herself again now, and showed not the least confusion at discovering her companion was related to her employer.

Jim wished she had not had such very blue eyes. They reminded him somehow of Alice Ainslie's.

"Have you ever been in Yorkshire before, Miss Ward?"

"Not since I was a child. Yorkshire is only a tradition to me."

"It is the most beautiful county in the world!" cried Jim, enthusiastically. "I have been abroad eight years, and you can't think how often I have longed for a breath off the Yorkshire moors."

"I suppose we all get home-sick at times," said Miss Ward, simply. "Word is as we will, that is what it comes to."

"I hope you do not speak from experience, Miss Ward," he answered, kindly. "You are over-young to know what home-sickness is."

"I don't," confessed Alice. "I have no home at all, properly speaking; only my aunt is very good to me, and I have spent a great deal of time with her."

"No home!"

"Don't look so sorry for me, please," said the girl, quickly. "Everyone can't have a home, you know. There must be a few wanderers."

"I have been a wanderer for eight years," said Jim. "But, then, I always had home to look forward to at the end."

"And your sister, Mrs. Macgregor?"

"She is my favourite sister, but I have three unmarried ones besides, and my father is still living—an old man now. I expect these eight years have changed him."

"It's such a pity no one can stop just as we leave them," said the girl, wistfully. "Everything changes, and the friends we leave forget us."

"I don't think you are likely to be forgotten, Miss Ward," said Jim, with a wistful look into her dark blue eyes. "But you are right that things and people change, especially after eight years."

"Did you like India?"

"Yes, very much. I'm only home on a year's leave. If my father can spare me I shall go out again; but he is getting an old man, and I am his only son."

"I like old men," said Miss Ward, simply. "They are always so kind and fatherly."

Jim pulled himself up with an effort just as he had been on the point of telling Miss Ward everyone must be kind to her.

"I'm an idiot!" muttered the young man to himself. "I have never set eyes on her before, and though I'm so interested in her that she seems just like an old friend, I can't expect her to feel like one. She must have been a little child when I went out to India. She doesn't look seventeen now. She must be a great contrast to my sometimes fiancée. Alice Ainslie specially warns me she is an independent woman, and has the courage of her opinions. This child looks made to depend on someone else's strength, and be petted and taken care of. Alice frankly declares she does not believe in love or sentimental rubbish. I can fancy little Miss Ward taking a great deal of pleasure in a man's honest devotion, poor little thing. I am very glad she is going to Mimie. She will appreciate her, but there must be a great many ladies who would think my little friend much too pretty for a governess."

He got the foot-warmer at Grantham. He persuaded Miss Ward to venture into the station dining-room at York under his protection.

He found her a comfortable seat well out of the draught and cold, when they waited for the train at Northallerton, and her simple thanks, her pleasant conversation, and bright interest in all she saw, made her a very charming companion; but when they had entered on the last stage of their journey, and were actually within two stations of Clarenceton, her mood changed. She ceased to talk cheerfully, she seemed hardly to hear what he said, and a strange, scared look had come into her beautiful eyes.

Jim pondered and pondered what she could be fretting about. At last he said, kindly—

"I hope you have not been drawing any alarming fancy pictures of my sister, Miss Ward. I assure you she is kindness itself; and if—as I suspect—this is your first appearance as a governess, you couldn't begin with more tractable children than my little nieces."

A smile came to Miss Ward's face, but she made no other answer; once, twice, she essayed to speak, but the words would not come.

Jim looked at her with a growing concern on his honest face.

"It's hard to leave your friends, I know," he said, kindly, "but I hope you will be happy at Castle Vernon."

"I am sure I shall be happy," cried Miss Ward, with sudden confidence. "I am so fond of children, and they always take to me; but I feel a little anxious. I am not the governess your sister engaged, you know, but just a stopgap, because Miss Fortescue is ill. It will be so dreadful for her—Nelly, I mean—if Mrs. Macgregor won't keep me till she is well enough to come."

Jim opened his eyes.

"And when she is well enough, what shall you do then?"

"Mrs. Macgregor has promised that if I suit her she will try and get me a permanent situation; so," and the girl looked very much in earnest, "a great deal depends on it."

"And your aunt can spare you?"

"Oh, yes; she is not alone. She has other relations and lots of friends. I have been a great anxiety to her," concluded the girl, simply; "but she has been very kind."

The train stopped at Clarenceton. The snow still fell, and had already covered everything with a deep white carpet.

Jim felt Miss Ward tremble as he handed her out of the carriage.

"Sit there, please!" he said, leading her to the waiting-room, where there was a blazing fire, "while I see after the luggage and find out what is waiting for us. I hope it's the brougham, for you ought not to go in an open carriage on such a bitter night."

Left alone by the blazing fire, a strange change came to the girl's face.

"I wish I hadn't done it," thought Alice Ainslie, otherwise Mary Ward. "Jim was always so true, he will never forgive the do-it. And, oh! if I hadn't written him that odious

letter! It would have been so much better to wait till he came home, and then give him his freedom in a proper, natural way. We can't even be friends now!"

But perhaps Captain Trafford thought otherwise, for the care with which he took Miss Ward to the carriage, and heaped the soft rug over her, was friendly in the extreme. He was pitying the little governess intensely.

He was going home to be fitted and made much of; she would be the only stranger in the family group, and would, doubtless, feel home-sick and lonely.

It was Alice who broke the silence as they turned in at the lodge-gates, and drove quickly to the Castle.

"Are you very pleased to be at home again, Captain Trafford—as pleased as you expected?"

He sighed.

"I am glad to see the old place again, but things are very different from what I expected. A hope has died out of my heart since I left Castle Vernon eight years ago, and my own disappointment will be shared by my father."

The friendly darkness hid Alice's crimson blush. She knew he was thinking of his engagement, and the cruel, unwomanly manner in which his fiancée had broken her truth. She blushed now whenever she thought of that letter.

Side by side they drove on up the long avenue, the girl's thoughts busy with what might have been. Had she so willed it, she might have entered Castle Vernon almost in triumph as the bride of its heir; had things been different, it would have been a sister's welcome which she would have received from Mrs. Macgregor. Now she was going as a paid dependent to the home that might have been her own.

There was a perfect blaze of light as they came in sight of the house. Alice could see a group of people gathered in the hall.

"Please leave me here," she said, timidly, to Captain Trafford; "your father is watching for you, and no one is waiting for me. Please let me stay here with the luggage!"

Jim did just what she asked. He had a dim suspicion his sister Mabel would be prejudiced against Miss Ward if the poor girl entered the Castle at his side.

He went quickly up the terrace steps. Another moment he was wringing his father's hand; while Mrs. Macgregor (whose heart was the kindest in the world) remembered the governess, and went forward to meet the little figure who followed Jim at a respectful distance.

Minnie told her husband afterwards her first thought was there must have been some mistake; her second, that Miss Fortescue had sent her a child instead of a governess.

Then, when Alice came into the brightly-lighted hall, and she could see the traces of tears on the beautiful face, her one idea was to make the little stranger feel at home, and screen her from Mabel's notice.

"Come upstairs and see the children," she said, kindly; "they are at tea, and I am sure you will be glad of some too. How did you leave Miss Fortescue?"

"She seems better, but the doctor thinks she ought not to come so far north as this."

"She looked to me terribly delicate," said Minnie, as they went upstairs; "but I knew that mine was not a hard situation, and I thought my little girls would be such a pleasant change for her after Mrs. Fuller's noisy brood."

"She is looking forward to it very much."

"Did you meet my brother at Clarenceton?"

"Captain Trafford got into the carriage where I was at King's Cross."

"Oh!"

"There was a faint shade of disapproval in that 'Oh!' and Alice thought it best to explain.

"I believe he came too late to get a place in a smoking-carriage. The porter almost

bundled him in, and before he could sit down over the train was off."

"Just like Jim," said Mrs. Macgregor, in a very different tone. "He was always almost too late. See, Miss Ward, this is what we make the nursery."

The little girls were like their mother in their simple good nature.

Mrs. Macgregor decided Miss Ward must have tea before she attempted to take off her things. She sent nurse down for some substantial additions to the meal, and placed a low chair by the fire for the governess.

"Another day I hope you will dine with us, but I am sure you are too tired to-night to face a party of strangers besides my father and three sisters. Sir Thomas and Lady Ainslie are here to-night; they are neighbours of ours, and have come to welcome my brother home."

Nurse was an old-fashioned servant, who knew a lady when she saw one, and she waited on Alice with the kindest respect, coming of her own accord to help her unpack when the two little girls had gone to dessert.

"And any little thing you need, Miss Ward, just tell me, and I'll see to it. This is a big house, but it's not so home-like as our house at Hastings. Mrs. Macgregor is only a visitor like yourself, and can't order things just as she would; but she wants you to be comfortable, miss."

"What time is breakfast, nurse?"

"Nine o'clock, Miss Ward, and you and the young ladies 'll be expected downstairs. You'll hear the gong; but I'll send the little girls to you five minutes beforehand."

The next morning Alice woke early, quite refreshed, and ready for any amount of excitement; and her heart rather sank at the prospect of meeting Sir Richard.

"I hope and trust he won't recognise me," she thought; "but Aunt Dorothy is always declaring I haven't altered a bit."

It was the first time she had ever dressed herself without the help of a maid; but she had been practising lately, and managed to effect the coronal of plaits on the pretty head without much difficulty.

She had on two or three rigidly plain dresses made for her sojourn with Mrs. Macgregor; but, if she had only known it, she looked prettier than ever in the trim blue serge, and hopelessly unlike a depressed orthodox governess. She had brought her diamond ring (perhaps she hoped for a chance of restoring it to its owner), but for days past she had left off wearing it, so there was no fear of that betraying her.

With a child on either side, she went downstairs as the gong sounded. It was a decided relief to find Mrs. Macgregor there before her, ready to introduce her to Sir Richard.

"This is my companion, papa, and the children's governess—Miss Ward."

"Welcome to the Castle, Miss Ward," replied the old man, kindly. "You look overgrown for this sort of thing. Why, you are not much more than a child yourself."

"Far too young to teach Daisy and Ethel anything useful," said a sharp voice near them. "Minnie, I really wonder at your folly."

Alice blushed crimson, but Mrs. Macgregor took her sister's attack quite cheerfully.

"I like young people. Mabel," she said, quietly, "and Miss Ward will get older every day."

Enter Captain Trafford. He came up to Alice with a bow, and kindly inquired as to whether she felt rested.

"Of course she does!" snapped Miss Trafford. "There's nothing tiring in travelling. You've nothing to do but sit still."

Alice decided, mentally. Mabel Trafford would be her bugbear while she remained at the Castle.

She found her eyes wandering often to Sir Richard's face when she thought herself unobserved. She could remember the old days, when he had been a constant visitor at Ainslie Grange. She wanted to see if he was altered.

"Just the same," was the verdict, as she listened to the kindly voice. "Just the same; but, oh! I hope he won't know me."

The little thought that a far worse danger threatened her at Castle Vernon than being recognised by Sir Richard as his old friend's child.

#### CHAPTER IV.

It was the middle of December. Alice Ainslie—alias Mary Ward—had been more than a fortnight at the Castle, and she regretted bitterly that she had ever come, for, alas! she had walked blindfold into a great trouble.

She had fallen in love with the very man to whom she had penned a heartless rejection. She wished she had spoilt every chance of happiness by her folly, for what a dreadful muddle she had made of her affairs!

Even if Jim loved her—and she hoped sometimes he did—how could he tell her so while he believed himself bound to Alice Ainslie? And even if he did tell her, how could she accept him, since it was equally impossible to confess the truth and own she was Alice Ainslie, writer of the letter which had so disgusted him, or to be married as Miss Ward, and lose her own identity for ever?

Captain Trafford was quite as miserable as his unknown fiancée, only, unlike her, he had made up his mind what course to take. He intended to wait until he saw Alice Ainslie at her cousin's, and then bravely tell her the truth—that his heart had passed from his own keeping, and he could never offer her a husband's affection.

Lookers-on, who proverbially see most of the game, were in this case desperately blind, for no one at the Castle had the least suspicion of the comedy being acted under their eyes; and so the December days wore on.

Sir Richard was anxious about his son's long-projected marriage, and openly told Jim he should be glad when Alice Ainslie became his daughter-in-law.

The old man spoke so affectionately of the pretty child he remembered long ago, and seemed so anxious for her happiness, that Jim, partly in self-defence, partly to show how little Alice's happiness depended on him, told his father of the letter he had received from her in India, and his firm belief that she was as eager to be free as he himself.

"You must come to some understanding when you meet her at Lady Ainslie's in January," said Sir Richard, sadly. "I can't think what Mrs. Ward has been about to let her grow up with such horrible ideas. She was the sweetest child I ever knew."

They parted. Father and son understood each other thoroughly. Both knew, without words, that Jim desired his freedom; but that if Alice Ainslie repented of her extraordinary letter, and wished to hold him to his engagement, he would be true to his word.

"What's the matter, Minnie?" asked Jim, an hour later, seeing his sister in the great hall, looking rather disconsolately at the fast-falling snow. "Surely the chicks are not out on such a bitter day as this!"

"Oh, no; they're safe in the nursery; but I am anxious about Miss Ward. She started directly after lunch to go to Glenavon," naming a small village about two miles off, which boasted a post-office and one or two humble shops. "Nurse says she had a letter in her hand. Foolish child, she might just as well have waited for the post-bag."

Mrs. Macgregor could not guess that Miss Ward had a nervous dread of anyone seeing the address of her letters. Foxglove Lodge, Kingsleigh, Kent, would have been a revelation to any of the family at Castle Vernon.

"I will go and meet her," he said, simply. "It is getting dark, and it is not fit for a girl to be out alone; besides, look at the snow. She might lose her way."

He started at once, waiting for neither thanks nor expostulation. The way to Glenavon was across the park, but in the snow anyone not familiar with the district might easily

lose the track and wander for hours in the mazes of the white-mantled slopes.

He was quite right. It was fail an hour before he found any traces of Miss Ward. Then it had grown quite dark, and only the friendly help of his lantern showed him the little figure concealed under the shelter of an old tree, as though for protection from the pitiless storm.

"Now, Miss Ward," cried Jim, speaking sharply, just to hide the emotion he felt. "what is the meaning of this? Do you want to kill yourself, that you venture out in such weather as this?"

"It did not snow when I started, and I lost my way, or I should have been home ages ago."

"I daresay. What do you mean by standing still? It is enough to give you your death of cold!"

"I am so tired"—there was almost a sob in the poor girl's voice—"so very tired, and I feel so miserable!"

Jim drew her hand through his arm, and half-led, half-carried her back to the footpath she had missed.

The danger she had been in only told him more plainly his own secret—he loved her. Of course, Miss Ainslie would set him free, but what would this child say to him?

"I wish you would take better care of yourself," he said, crossly. "Minnie is scared nearly out of her wits about you."

"Mrs. Macgregor is very kind to care."

"Don't talk like that," said Jim, angrily. "You will persist in speaking of yourself as though you weren't worth troubling about, and—I don't like it!"

Something in his voice stirred her heart to its very depths. She felt that he loved her; but, oh! how should she break down the barriers her own folly had raised between them? She could not say to him, "I am Alice Ainslie," because of that horrible letter she had sent to him in India. She could not let him speak kindly to her as "Miss Ward," because every word was a stab to her, knowing how she was deceiving him.

"To-morrow will be Christmas Eve," said Alice, trying hard to speak on indifferent subjects. "Do they keep Christmas in India, Captain Trafford?"

"I don't want to talk about India," said Jim. "I have something very serious to say to you. Mrs. Macgregor is going home directly after New Year's Day—a week on Thursday. Shall you be with her at Hastings?"

"I don't know."

"Minnie was saying yesterday she had very bad accounts of Miss Fortescue's health, and that she thought you would perhaps agree to stay with her always."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

Alice could not answer, and he went on, eagerly, pressing the hand he still held more closely.

"Will you promise to stay with my sister until I come to her? I cannot speak more plainly now—I may not; but surely you will promise me this much, not to vanish from my life as suddenly as you came into it. In a very little while I hope to come to Hastings. Promise me that I shall find you there?"

"I cannot promise."

"Why not?" he persisted.

What should she do? She loved him so, and there was a time when he had been hers, and hers only. Oh! how mad she had been to trifle with her happiness; and now, here was Jim waiting for her answer, and—what could she say?

"I do not think I shall go to Hastings." Her voice was very sad and heavy, but every word fell distinctly on his ear. "Captain Trafford, I had better not go. I ought never to have come here. Miss Fortescue is my dear friend; she was ill, and she wanted to keep your sister's situation open for her, and so I promised to come for a little while."

"And what was there wrong in that?"

"Everything, I am afraid," said the girl, simply; "for I knew if I had told Mrs. Macgregor who I was, she would never have let me be her children's governess!"

Jim's heart seemed to stand still.

"Who are you?" he asked, harshly, just because he was so afraid of breaking down. "Surely you do not mean you have come here under a false name, and deceived us all wilfully?"

"I have done just that!" said Alice, gravely. "I am not Mary Ward at all. In my own true name, Captain Trafford, you would have shrunk from me in aversion; for—"

The sentence was never finished. She had meant to add, "for I am Alice Ainslie"; but at that moment a gust of wind blew the umbrella out of Jim's hand. When he had recovered it they were at the foot of the terrace steps. He withdrew his hand, and said, coldly—

"You cannot mistake your way now. I will not ask your reason for this cruel deception—I do not seek to know it—only there are others of my family who would have less forbearance. For your own sake I would advise you to leave the Castle directly after Christmas. Such an accomplished imagination as yours will have no difficulty in inventing some plausible excuse."

The girl turned her beautiful eyes upon him. They shone like amethysts in the darkness.

"Say one kind word to me," she pleaded. "I meant no harm, and I have been so happy here!"

"Happy!" he cried, bitterly. "Happy! while you were doing your best to break an honest heart. I won't forgive you; I won't speak fair to you; while I have but one wish—that I may never see your beautiful false face again!"

#### CHAPTER V.

It was Christmas Eve. The snow lay thick on the ground. The sky was a dull grey tint, almost giving promise of more snow yet to come. There was a strange want of Christmas merriment in the faces gathered round the breakfast-table at Castle Vernon. Jim thought, as he made his tardy appearance. One glance told him the little governess was not present, but he was not surprised. Mrs. Macgregor, alarmed at her white face, had sent her to bed the evening before, directly she returned from her weary pilgrimage to Glenavon, and had specially forbidden her to rise till after breakfast.

Sir Richard looked troubled, as though he had not recovered from yesterday's conversation with his son. Mrs. Macgregor had an anxious air, for she fancied one of her little girls had taken cold. As for the three Miss Traffords, it must be confessed they were wont to look rather sour; spinsters of thirty turned are apt to cultivate rather an acidulated expression.

There were to be no particular festivities at the Castle, except that Sir Thomas and Lady Ainslie were coming over to spend Christmas, and that to-morrow there would be a dance in the servants' hall to celebrate the heir's safe return from India.

Jim looked round the table and wondered if he would be expected to settle down at the Castle for the rest of his life. He knew it would well-nigh break his father's heart if he went abroad again for another term of service; but how could he bring himself to live in this quiet Yorkshire mansion, where he had suffered the cruellest sorrow of his life?

Breakfast was over. The "girls," as the Miss Traffords were still styled by courtesy, went about their usual vocations; Minnie took her children to the nursery. Sir Richard turned to his son.

"I kept this back, Jim. I did not want you to have it while your sisters were here—it is from Alice Ainslie."

Jim started. Had she changed her mind, or was this letter merely to confirm her previous one, and give him once again his freedom? He took it listlessly enough. What

did Alice Ainslie's decision matter to him, since the other hope was shattered, and nothing in all the world would give him back his faith in his little love?

"Do open it," urged Sir Richard. "I want to know what Miss Ainslie says."

It was a very different letter from the one she had sent him in India, and Jim felt almost a friendly regard for the girl who expressed herself so frankly. But what did anything matter now?

"My dear Captain Trafford.—You may be surprised at hearing from me before our projected meeting at Ainslie Grange, but I have a confession to make to you, and I know I shall be ashamed to make it when I see you, so I preferred to send this letter. When I wrote to you in India I was very angry. My aunt was always talking about my engagement, and I had got the idea you thought I was bound to wait weekly, like a parson in a cloak-room, till you 'called' for me, so I wrote and made myself out about as horrible as I could, hoping to disgust you.

"As a fact, I don't understand anything about 'Women's Rights,' and I hate girls who talk about the Cause. I believe I am just an ordinary English girl, neither particularly objectionable nor the reverse. Aunt Dorothy has spoilt me dreadfully, and she would be almost heartbroken if she knew about that terrible letter, so will you please try and forget all about it?"

"But as we have not met for so many years, and as perhaps we shall not like each other, I would like best for us still to be free. When I see you at Ainslie Grange, perhaps we can be friends. You used to be very good to me when I was a child, and I would rather have you for my own chosen friend than for a lover against your will."

"I know I have been very foolish, but things were very trying when I wrote that horrible letter, so please forgive

"ALICE AINSLIE."

Jim started as he finished the penitent note. It was so simple, it had come so evidently from the girl's heart, that he felt touched. Perhaps they might be friends after all. He was just going to tell his father the tenor of the letter when Mrs. Macgregor came into the room with a white, scared face.

"Papa—Jim, something terrible has happened! Miss Ward has disappeared!"

"Nonsense, child," said Sir Richard, promptly, for Jim was past speaking at all. "What makes you think so?"

"She got up very early, and nurse says she came in with her things on to kiss the children, but she never thought anything more than that Miss Ward was going for a walk. But she has taken a black bag with her, and her box is ready packed in her room."

Sir Richard's face grew very grave.

"Has she left no letter explaining her flight, Minnie? I can't believe that she would go off like this without a word or sign."

Nurse came in while her mistress was trying to answer. She carried in her hand a little note. It was very short and simple, only telling Mrs. Macgregor that Miss Ward had left her because she "thought it best."

"Thank you again and again for all your kindness," wrote the poor child. "But I know now I ought never to have come. My aunt warned me it was unwise, but I was so anxious to help Nelly Fortescue, and I wanted to come to Castle Vernon. Please forgive me, and think as kindly of me as you can."

"Miss Ward has gone home, nurse," said Minnie, feeling, for the girl's own sake, she must try and silence any gossip about her flight. "The friend in whose place she came to me is very ill, and she wanted to see her again."

"Indeed, ma'am, and I wish the young lady had only said the word and had the carriage to take her to Clarendon. It's not fit for a long walk that she is, and she'll have a bitter journey, for it's the coldest day I ever knew."

"Nurse was very fond of her," said Minnie, as the woman disappeared. "It is strange how Miss Ward seemed to creep into one's heart. I can't understand her letter the least in the world, and yet I feel she can't have done anything wrong, and if she had only trusted me I would have tried to help her."

Jim was silent. He had received Miss Ward's note from his father, and the strange fancy had seized him. The writing much resembled that in Alice Ainslie's penitent letter.

His sometime fiancée had been brought up by an aunt. His sister's governess acknowledged no near relation. Miss Ward had come from Bromley, which was the nearest town to Kingsleigh. The girl's strange reserve about herself, her unaccountable habit of always posting her own letters, would all be explained if she were indeed Miss Ainslie.

Even her own words that she "ought never to have come to Castle Vernon" and Mrs. Macgregor had she known her real name would never have engaged her as governess, even this confession, which at the time Jim imagined to refer to some shameful secret, would agree perfectly with his theory that she was Alice.

A certainty stole upon Jim that it was over so. The child fiancée to whom he had kept faith all these many years was the beautiful girl to whom he had lost his heart at first sight. If only he had been gentler with her yesterday she would have told him all; and now she was a lonely wanderer on this bitter December day, and his last words to her had been a prayer that he might never see her face again!

#### CHAPTER VI.

Alice Ainslie left Castle Vernon with no fixed idea but to escape another meeting with Captain Trafford.

She loved him dearly. She believed his whole heart was hers; and yet so troubled had been the course of their affection that she could see no break in the clouds.

She had sent the letter Jim received that morning to Kingsleigh, begging her aunt to post it.

She had not been quite hopeless then. She had hoped that letter would soften Jim's heart, and that when she met him in her own true character at Ainslie Grange sunshine might reign between them; but now, alas! this hope was over.

She had been far too excited and upset to study the time-table. She knew from chance conversation that the first train left Clarenceton at nine. She caught it with much difficulty, and then, to her dismay, found, at North Allerton, all the passengers had to alight, as it went no farther, and there was not a train south for two hours.

"You're not due in London till five, miss," the civil porter told her; "and being Christmas time and such bad weather, you'll be late, I expect. Just sit down, miss, and I'll come and find you when the train's in."

She was shivering in every limb, poor child. She had forgotten her muff, and had brought no rug to protect her on the long journey. She pulled up the collar of her ulster, and waited patiently, sad and sick at heart.

What a contrast to Alice's last journey!

There was no one now to procure foot-warmers for her at the different stations. There was no one to lend her his rug, or beguile the tediousness of the way by pleasant talk.

At some of the places where they stopped Alice saw parties of happy-looking people carrying large parcels (evidently Christmas purchases), with cheerful faces, full of peace and goodwill.

She could hear their joyous greetings, their salutations of "Merry Christmas!" and a strange lump came in her throat, and the tears were very near her eyes.

The guard came to look after her at York; for guards are human, and the sight of the weary little face had aroused his pity.

Minnie, strange to one's taste, 't have d only p her." Miss Ainslie, a much eminent

He told her there was half-an-hour to wait, and asked her if she would not like some lunch; but Alice was afraid to leave the carriage. She swallowed a cup of tea and a sandwich brought her by her friend in need, and then she sat down to while away as best she might the four mortal hours that remained of the journey.

"We'll be an hour late to a certainty, miss!" the guard assured her. "The snow's that deep we can hardly get along, it's a bad day for travelling."

Evidently other people were of his opinion, for Alice saw one party leave the train and deliberately announce their intention of spending the night at York rather than venture farther, and instead of crowded platforms, hardly any passengers appeared at the stations where they stopped.

It grew dark, and the carriage lamp became useful in other places than tunnels.

Alice leant back in her corner, cramped and numb in every limb; and at last, worn out by fatigue and grief, she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was with the sensation that something had happened. The train was perfectly still, but they were not at a station.

Looking out, Alice could see nothing but darkness. She was conscious of a bruised, shaken feeling, as though she had been knocked violently against the walls of the carriage.

She put down the window and then she could distinguish the welcome sound of voices. Evidently something had happened, but what? She was soon to know. The friendly guard flung open the door, a lamp in his hand.

"Don't be frightened, miss," he said, kindly, "but there's an accident. We were so much behind time that the driver put on steam, and, in the fog, he didn't see the signals was against him, and we ran into a goods train just inside the tunnel. I'm afraid you're a bit shaken, miss; but be thankful it's no worse. There's a deal of harm done to the front part of the train."

"And where are we?"

"About two miles from Dagley Bridge, a place a little north of Grantham. Sit where you are, miss, and I'll send someone to you soon. What's in front of us is no sight for you; and strong man though he was, he shuddered at the thought."

Left alone, Alice leant back wearily. There was no anxiety or eagerness to know the worst at her heart, only a kind of restless feeling that it was a pity she had not died this Christmas Eve, and someone whose life was of value been spared. Would Captain Trafford bear of this accident? Would he forgive her now, and be just a little sorry for the harsh things he had said to her only yesterday? Perhaps—

She was aroused by the carriage door again opening; but this time it was no guard who entered with a lamp. She found her hands clasped suddenly in a warm, close pressure, and a man's voice cried reverently,

"Thank heaven!"

"Captain Trafford—Jim." She only breathed his name. Then, overcome with all the terrors of that dreadful day, she fainted.

When Alice came to herself she was lying on a horse-hair sofa in a quaint, homely room, which was really the best parlour of the railway hotel at Dagley Bridge. A grave, elderly man was bending over her with an anxious face, and at a little distance stood Jim Trafford, with a look of agony on his kindly features.

"Ah!" said the doctor, as Alice slowly opened her eyes, "she will do now. I can leave her in your care while I go and look after the other sufferers; there are plenty of people needing me to-night, unfortunately."

Left alone in the pleasant glow of the bright wood fire, Alice Ainslie raised her pansy-blue eyes to her lover's face, for he was her lover in spite of all the cruel things he had said to her.

"Am I dying?"

"My darling, no," he cried, huskily, "not if there is mercy in heaven. You fainted from the shock of the accident, and the fatigue of that dreadful journey."

"Were you in the train?"

"I came to look for you," he said, simply. "You surely didn't think I could rest, after your letter, without knowing what had become of you."

"But you were angry."

"I was very angry," confessed Jim; "but, oh! my darling, I have repented of my harshness bitterly since I lost you."

"You said you could never forgive me," said Alice, simply, "and that you prayed you might never see my face again."

"Did I?"

"Yes; and you nearly broke my heart."

"Then you cared too, dear—just a little?"

"I cared too much," said the girl, brokenly, "for you will never forgive me. All I told you yesterday is quite true; I am not Miss Ward."

For all answer, Jim opened his arms and strained the slight figure to his heart.

"Listen to me," he cried, passionately. "I don't care what your name is, my darling. I only know I love you with all my heart, and that I shall never have any happiness unless you are my wife."

"But—but Miss Ainslie?" asked the girl, with a strange smile.

"I have the strangest fancy, dear, about Alice Ainslie. Your writing is just like hers, and you, like her, have an Aunt Dorothy. From the moment I first saw you, you reminded me of someone. I never knew until this morning that it was of the little girl to whom I plighted my troth nine years ago."

"Ten," she corrected, and then blushed rosy red. Seeing what her speech implied, Jim smiled.

"Whether you are Alice Ainslie or little Miss Ward, darling, you are my heart's best treasure; but I own I should like to know my future wife's name. Are you—"

"I am Alice Ainslie," confessed his sweet-heart. "Oh, Jim! what a muddle I have made of things!"

Jim laughed; he really could not help it.

"All's well that ends well," he said, cheerfully. "We were engaged long ago to please other people. Now remember, young lady, you have promised to-night, of your own free will, to be my wife, and I mean to marry you as soon as ever I can get a ring and a house. In proof of which, Alice, please—kiss me!"

She blushed crimson, and would have turned away, but Captain Trafford persisted.

"You owe it to me," he said, gravely. "Just think of what you have made me suffer."

And as their lips met, it seemed to both that the last cloud rolled away from their happiness.

"I have telegraphed to Mrs. Ward," said Jim, presently, "and I am sure she will be here to-morrow. The doctor is an awfully good fellow, and has promised to put me up for the night. The worthy landlady, Mrs. Hawkes, will keep you in order."

The next morning, Alice felt as well and strong as ever, and nothing would content her but going to church with Jim; and so the old grey stone building welcomed two strangers to share in its Christmas worship, and there was a special mention in the general thanksgiving of two who desired to offer hearty thanks for great mercies vouchsafed to them.

Out into the December sunshine, lighting up the snow like diamonds, back to the Boar's Head, to find Mrs. Ward had arrived and was waiting to welcome them.

The Christmas bells rang out their joyous peal as Alice was clasped in her aunt's arms, and Jim wrung the dear old lady's hand as he received her sanction of the engagement made so long ago and ratified last night.

It was the strangest Christmas ever spent by Jim and Alice. Mrs. Hawkes treated them

to her best plum-pudding, and roasted a turkey in their honour.

Aunt Dorothy presided at the feast with a sunny face, and Jim declared he had never been so happy at Castle Vernon as in this homely parlour.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Alice, as he spoke. "I had quite forgotten Sir Richard and Mrs. Macgregor. What will they say? Do you think they will ever forgive me, Jim?"

"I think," said Captain Trafford, "they love you already as little Miss Ward, and they will be delighted with you turning out to be the wife they selected for me so long ago!"

And though people don't often behave as they are wished to do, Minnie and her father proved themselves exceptions to the rule, for they welcomed Alice Ainslie with warm affection, and assured her they always thought she was "just the wife for Jim," even in the old days when she was little Miss Ward.

Sir Thomas and Lady Ainslie were delighted; the baronet gave Alice a handsome portion, and begged the young couple would consider the Grange as their chief home.

As the three spinster sisters still preside over Castle Vernon, Jim's pretty wife prefers the Grange, where she is petted and cherished as a daughter of the house; but Captain Trafford wanted a home of his own, so the young couple took a flat in Belgravia; though, with constant visits to Hastings and Kingsleigh, they can hardly be said to "live" there.

Nelly Fortescue saw the perfect happiness that had dawned for her favourite friend, before in early spring she faded into sleep.

Alice's baby-daughter is called Helen, and some day her childish fingers will be taught to strew flowers on the grave of her namesake in Kingsleigh churchyard.

So the romance ended happily, and, as Jim Trafford declared, he was quite contented so that he got his wife at last; but he never denied that his pretty Alice had made of their affairs—as she herself confessed—A Terrible Muddle!

[THE END.]

### IF!

If your heart could throb for me,  
Even for a moment's space,

With the love I feel for thee

Gazing on thy glorious face.

If the passions that I feel

Found response within your breast,

Years of anguish could not steal

Memories that I had been blest.

If that slim white hand could twine  
Lovingly about mine own,

Though 'twere but the fleeting sign

Of a fondness felt and gone.

Though there dwelt a farewell token

In that light caress from thee,

I could live not quite heart-broken

Knowing you had once loved me.

If those eyes so darkly glorious,  
Kindled as with mine they met,

I should hold myself victorious.

Even though you did forget

I could give the lifelong passion

Of a thousand meeker souls,

For one hour's brief adoration

Over thine to sway control.

If ambition lured you upward

To the pinnacle of fame,

You might have my very heart's blood

Could it write that honoured name.

And if—if you earlier died, love,

Though my love were taught to thee,

One dead leaf from off thy grave, love,

Would be all the world to me.

The man who boasts of his war records,  
Howls the loudest when he is wearing a mustard plaster.

## Facetiae

A CORRESPONDENT inquires: "How can I tell the age of a horse?" If you are anxious to sell the beast don't tell it at all.

It's strange about a man and a pistol when he's got it pointed at you. You want the man to go off, but you don't want the pistol to.

SMOKELESS powder means death to that old familiar expression: "He died with the smoking revolver clutched in his right hand."

MRS. CUMSO: "George, dear, how can you tell the poison mushrooms from the harmless ones?" Cumso: "If you get poisoned it's the poison mushrooms."

MR. SPOONEY (slipping ring on her finger): "Does it please you?" Miss Dash: "Yes, indeed; I am never so happy as when I have a new engagement ring."

REASON ENOUGH: "Daughter, a girl should never throw herself at a young man." "Why, mamma?" "Because girls are usually very inaccurate in their aim."

THERE are three men of note," remarked Daughter Vickman to a friend. "Who are they?" "One is a reporter, another is a musician, and the third is a money-lender."

"It's unaccountable," he said, as he stood on the scales, after a walk on the beach. "I've gained five pounds in one hour!" "Have you emptied the sand out of your shoes?" she asked.

"LADIES," said the old grey-headed teacher, "I am sorry to confess it, but I'd rather have five young men from the high school than one of you." "So would we, teacher," was the general reply.

SNODGRASS: "I have all my clothes made by Koffkowsky, a Polish tailor. Poles made the best tailors in the world." Smivety: "Nonsense! It's a fact. The needle is true to the Pole, you know."

"Is that Harry Scribbler's writing, Kitty?" asked Sybil. "Yes, I'm engaged to him, you know," answered Kitty. "Of course, I was engaged to him last summer." "The dear boy! I wonder who he'll eventually marry?"

DEAR MR. PRETTYMAN, do help me. I am making a collection of coins of the year of my birth," said a gushing lady of a certain age. "Alas! my dear madam," he replied, "those ancient coinages are getting so dreadfully rare."

"It was Mr. Beaux-Yaux, wasn't it, who said that woman was created after man, and so she was only an afterthought, anyway?" asked Phyllis. "Yes," and Marjorie quietly smiled at her, and said that it was a universally admitted fact that second thoughts were the best.

HUNTER: "I have travelled extensively, and have met fierce animals of every kind; and to my thinking the one most to be dreaded is the wild boar." Marter: "A dreadful creature, surely; but in my experience, one still more to be feared is the tame bore, who makes all his auditors wild."

"And so you're married, Bridget?" "Yes, mum." "And what does your husband do?" "An' shure, mum, he is a railroad doirector." "A railroad director? That's a very important position. Are you quite sure it is that?" "An' faith an' doesn't he stand all day at the railroad directing people to the cars?"

HUMANITARIAN TOURIST: "And what has become of that funny little rabbit that used to gambol about your yard and stables last spring, Pat?" Irish Innkeeper: "Your honour had rabbit stew for dinner, sorr." H. Tourist: "What? You don't mean to tell me that you killed the droll little creature for my dinner's sake?" Irish Innkeeper (abashed): "Begorra! no, sir. On my oath, he died of himself, sorr."

MILDRED: "What would you do if you had a voice like mine?" "I should be very careful not to overwork it."

"If you had no idea when you could get married, Tom, why did you propose?" "To tell the truth, dear, I had no idea that you would accept me!"

HARRY: "You and Tom appear to be the best of friends." Dick: "Why shouldn't we? We never say what we think of each other."

MRS. JOY: "If I do say it, my husband is worth millions of money to me." Mrs. Blunt: "How lucky of you to snap him up when he was going cheap!"

"How about references?" inquired the mistress. "Oh, I looks yer looks, mum," said the applicant for the position of housemaid, "an' I won't ask yer for references."

HIX: "I noticed your wife sitting by the window sewing this morning. I thought you told me yesterday she was ill?" Dix: "So she was; but to-day she's on the mend."

"I BROKE my mother's heart when I tried to obey her." "How was that?" "Why, she told me not to marry for money, but to marry where money was. So I married a girl in the mint."

"FAITH cure?" an old lady repeated, recently, on being told that this was the latest form of intellectual revelry prevalent. "Well, I'm glad if they are getting their faith cured. I'm sure they need it."

MRS. OLDBOY: "Oh, you needn't talk, John. You were bound to have me. You can't say that I ever ran after you." Oldboy: "Very true, Maria; and the trap never runs after the mouse, but it gathers him in all the same."

BROWN (at the hotel): "This may be a first-class hotel, but I tell you that I can get a better meal in a third-class restaurant any day in the week." Fogg: "Seems more like home to you, eh? Well, well, there's something in that."

PRINTER'S WIFE: "Don't you think our boy needs a composing draught to quiet his restlessness?" Printer: "No; quite the contrary. He wants a composing stick, and he'll get it if he don't stop his monkey tricks at short notice!"

PROF. WETTREDUST (a few years hence): "Good morning, Mr. Tiller. Anything in my line to-day. I have brought my balloons and explosives along." Mr. Tiller (American farmer): "Well, I dunno. What's the price of rain now?"

"WHAT'S the price of cheese?" "Fifteen cents per pound." "But the fellow opposite sells it for ten." "Then go there and buy it." "But he hasn't got any." "Well, then, the kind of cheese I haven't got you can have at ten cents a pound also."

"YOU say your husband has tried to stop smoking, but can't?" "Yes." "Why doesn't he try an ocean voyage?" "What good would that do him?" "It might cure him. I have a friend who went on an ocean voyage, and the first day at sea he gave up everything."

TOO many buts (in the gloaming): Algernon Du Bois (fondly): "Sweet girl, I fain would call you mine, but—but—" Sweet girl (softly): "Well, dear?" A Du B. (hesitatingly): "I love you fondly, but—" S. G. (icily): "Algy, if you please, cease being a goat and talk like a man."

THE VALUE OF IT.—A learned man can afford to admit that he does not know everything. Once, a fashionable woman asked a well-known savant, "What are the rings of Saturn composed of, professor?" "I don't know, your grace," was the reply. "What is the value of being so learned if you cannot tell me so simple a thing about one of our largest planets?" inquired the duchess. "The value is," he replied, "it enables me to say to such a question, 'I don't know.'"

"THEY tell me, professor, you have mastered all the modern tongues." "Well, yes; all but my wife's and her mother's."

YOUNG MOTHER: "Horrors! Here's an account in the paper of a woman who sold her baby for ten cents." Young Father (wearily): "Perhaps it was teething."

"WHAT was Nero's greatest act of cruelty?" asked the teacher of the class in history. "Playing the fiddle," was the prompt response, and the teacher let it go at that.

SHE: "Did you hear about young Tomkyns?" He: "No. What?" She: "Took up a pistol and blew his brains out last night!" He: "Must have been a mighty good shot."

WILLING to do his best. "Johnny," said the pretty teacher, "what is a kiss?" "I can't exactly put it in words," returned the boy, "but if you really want to know, I can show you."

STICKER is getting to be quite a society man. He tells me that he always makes a point to be among the first-nighters at the theatre." "Yes; Sticker owns a billboard, I understand."

MISS ENTHUSIASM: "What a noble fellow Mr. Blank, the poet, is! He just lives on his thoughts." Mr. Cynicus: "I don't doubt it. He looks as though he were accustomed to a pretty weak diet."

"It strikes me, my dear," said he, sarcastically, as the cries of the baby arose above the lullaby she was trying to sing to it, "that your voice is something of a Jonah—it is swallowed up by a wail."

"No," said Miss Cayenne, "I shouldn't say that he is illiterate." "What should you say?" "That his vocabulary is too large. He has acquired more words than he has had time to learn to spell or pronounce."

"YES, the ceremony has been performed and John and Mary are one." "Indeed, which one?" "Well," replied the father of the bride, "from what I know of Mary's mother, I should say—but, ah! here she comes."

AUTHOR (of new play in far Western theatre): "Hark! What's that queer noise?" Western Manager: "Comes from the audience." "Eh, is that their style of applauding?" "No, it's the clicking of revolvers. I think they are getting ready to call for the author."

"I WONDER if Meggs is making any money writing books?" "You can find out easily enough. Ask him if he would advise any of his friends to take to writing books for a living." "And if he is succeeding himself he will say 'Yes' I see." "Not at all. If he is succeeding he will say 'No'."

"WILLIE, did you thank Mr. Speedway for taking you to drive?" said the mother of a small boy, solicitously. "No answer. The question was repeated. Still no answer. "Willie! Do you hear me? Did you thank Mr. Speedway for taking you to drive?" "Yes," whispered Willie, "but he told me not to mention it!"

"WHEN I marry I shall try to be sure of one thing, and that is, that I have a woman of sense." "You mean a woman of prejudice and forethought, with fine perceptions and a knowledge of human nature?" "Yes, that's it exactly." "But they are just the ones who never marry."

"PLEASE, sir," said the bell-boy to a hotel clerk, "number thirty says there ain't no towel in his room." "Tell him to use one of the window curtains." "He says, too, there ain't no pillows." "Tell him to put his coat and vest under his head." "And he wants a pitcher of water." "Suffering Cyrus! But he is the worst kicker I ever struck in my life. Carry him up the horse-pail." "He wants to know if he can't have a light." "Here, confound him! Give him this lantern, and ask him if he wants the earth, and if he'll have it fried only on one side, or turned over."

## Gleanings

THESE are four sorts of readers—hour-glass readers, whose reading runs in and out, leaving nothing; sponge readers, who imbibe all, but only to give it out again as they got it, and perhaps not so clean; jelly-bag readers, who keep the dregs and refuse, and let the pure run through; and diamond readers, who cast aside all that is worthless and hold only the gems.

A FORTUNE FOR A SONG.—Happy is the lot of the successful singer. During her tour in the United States, Madame Adelina Patti will receive about 6,500 dollars for each performance, and an ingenuous American, with a head for figures, calculated that she will be receiving a little over two and a-half dollars for every second she is upon the stage. She will sing about 1,800 notes at each performance, so that each note will be paid for at the rate of three and a-quarter dollars. Finally, the statistician estimated that every time the great singer draws a breath during her songs she will earn about two and a-half dollars.

A WEIRD LIGHT.—Mr. Peter Cooper Hewitt, the American millionaire, whose light has been the subject of recent discussion, is the grandson of Mr. Peter Cooper, who in 1830 made the first American locomotive—the famous old engine with the gun-barrel-boiler. The rich inventor, in his workshop high up in the Madison Tower, five years ago set himself to the task of producing light without heat, and now he has succeeded. No women are employed in the Hewitt workshop, and it is safe to say that none could be hired to stay in the room ten minutes. The most beautiful woman in New York would become a hideous fright under the rays of a Hewitt lamp. It sends out no red rays, and as a result produces a most ghastly effect. The human skin loses its flesh tints; the reddest lips become a livid blue, and the face and hands turn purplish yellow, with dark-blue blotches. Under this light, oak furniture appears light green, and brown wall-paper becomes grey. Since his graduation from Columbia, Mr. Hewitt has perfected several useful inventions. The most important of them are: A glue stock cutter; a glue clarifier; a fish hatchery; a bicycle tire road wagon.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE.—In an article called "Human Personality After Death," Mr. Lang tells the story of a Mr. Wilmot, who left Liverpool for New York on October 3, 1865. That fact, the sailing of the ship, is officially concealed. Mr. Wilmot's cabin-mate, sleeping in the berth above him, was an Englishman, in Anglican orders, the Rev. William Tait, now deceased. After eight days of tempest there came a lull. Mr. Wilmot slept well, but dreamed that his wife, then in America, entered his cabin in her night-dress, hesitated on seeing that he was not alone, advanced, kissed him, and withdrew. On waking he found Mr. Tait looking at him. "You're a pretty fellow," said Mr. Tait, "to have a lady come and visit you in this way." On being pressed, Mr. Tait admitted that he, being then awake, had seen what Mr. Wilmot saw only in a dream. He thrice repeated his statement, in answer to Mr. Wilmot's inquiries. Moreover, Miss Wilmot, in the same ship, says that Mr. Tait asked her if she had visited her brother; and told her that he had seen a woman in white enter the cabin. On joining his family, Mr. Wilmot was asked by his wife if he had seen her when she visited him "a week ago on Tuesday." She then explained that, when apparently awake in bed, she seemed to herself to cross the sea, enter his state-room, see a man in the upper berth, yet advance and kiss her husband. She correctly described the ship, and a peculiar arrangement of the berths. In this case she did not appear to herself to see the ship from her bed, but to move to it through space.

THE city of Potosi, in Bolivia, South America, is 15,330 ft. above sea level. Galera, a railway station in Peru, has an elevation of 15,635 ft., and near it, at the same level, a tunnel 3,847 ft. long is being driven through the mountains. Leadville, Colorado, is 10,200 ft. above the sea. But the highest elevation, it is said, at which any regular inhabited dwelling is found is that of a Buddhist monastery, in Thibet—16,000 ft.

LADIES' HATS.—It was stated the other day that big hats for ladies are going out of fashion. The typical hat is one with a profusion of feathers. Not a woman, whatever her station, would consider herself sufficiently bedecked who carried no feather in her adorning. At Court it is a law, and in the lowest of alleys and slums it is paramount to everything. In mean streets it is even more worshipped than elsewhere, for it is a time-honoured custom that the first sign of wealth shall show itself, by the disporting of a feather, a plume of brilliant hue with which to fire with envy the many neighbours who crowd together in all the dark corners of large towns. And it is this feather that makes the typical hat of the belle of the East End.

STARVATION AND THE HUMAN BODY.—It is a popular belief that the human body cannot live more than about a week without nourishment. This notion has been exploded, and it has been demonstrated as a fact that the body will not die till the skeleton condition has been reached, unless the virulence of his disease carries him off in the meantime. The life spirit, or vital force—call it what you will—lies in the brain and nervous system, and the body is so much fuel, and when a man starves, the brain feeds upon the tissues of the body, first abstracting that least required, the fatty matter; then it levies toll upon the other tissues, with the result that the body loses weight at the rate of from one to two pounds daily, according to the exercise taken; therefore, the brain will not succumb as long as it has anything to feed upon.

MRS. ROOSEVELT'S SOCIAL DUTIES.—The recent illness of President Roosevelt's wife is stated to be due to the tremendous round of social duties she has participated in since November. The following list shows the strain under which she has been since that month:—House guests entertained, 200; dinner parties given, 36; average guests at each dinner party, 20; guests at luncheon, 275; guests at breakfast, 50; State dinners, 3; average number of guests at State dinners, 90; attended Cabinet dinners, 8; musicals given, 6; average number of guests at musicals, 300; total guests at musicals, 1,800; State receptions, 5; guests at New Year's reception welcomed by her, 8,000; guests at four other State receptions, 7,200; afternoon receptions given by Mrs. Roosevelt, 5; average number guests at each afternoon reception, 1,200; total guests at afternoon receptions, 6,000; guests invited to Blue Room, entertained after State receptions, 1,500.

THE FORERUNNER OF GIANT LOCOMOTIVES.—The railway companies are at present vying with one another in turning out large and powerful locomotives, and we heard the other day of engines travelling at an average speed approaching seventy miles an hour. These Leviathans contrast wonderfully with the little model made by William Murdoch, in 1784, which was the first locomotive engine made and run in England. This original model is still in existence. It is about 14 in. high and 19 in. long, and consists of an oblong board, mounted upon three wheels, with two driving-wheels at the rear attached to a crank-axle, and one steering-wheel in front, arranged under the board. Behind the driving-wheels is the boiler, a rectangular copper vessel, a circular chamber forming the fire-box being connected with a small funnel in the top of the boiler, which serves to carry off the products of combustion from a spirit-lamp, arranged to burn within the fire-box.

CONTRIVED BY A LAZY MAN.—It is on record that the idea of working semaphores from a distance originated in the contrivance of a lazy or perhaps overworked Irish porter, who, having two signals at some distance apart under his charge, conceived the happy notion of counter-weighting the handle of one and so connecting it with a clothes-line that he could manage to work it from the other. An inspector, seeing the ingenious device, and noting its possibilities, took the matter up and enlarged upon it, with a result that signal cabins and levers contained therein were presently established throughout all the lines.

ORIGIN OF THE SAUCER.—Tea drinking is as universal and as ceremonious in China as in Japan, although the *cha-no-ya* is not practised. No great is ever allowed to depart without having been offered a cup of the pale, straw-coloured liquid from one to a dozen times. The Chinese themselves drink tea at odd moments all day long. They keep it warm in a wadded tea basket, adding fresh water from time to time. Among the better class, the tiny teacups are set into curious little boat-shaped holders of brass, silver or wicker-work, when they are handed around. As the holders are not used by the person drinking and the cups are guiltless of handles, it is oftentimes an awkward piece of business for the Occident to manage to drink his tea without spilling it or burning his hands. Another method used by the mandarins is to infuse the tea in a covered bowl instead of in a teapot. The cover fits inside the bowl, and is used as the lid of a teapot. It was the misuse of this cover by the European which gave rise to the saucer of our day.

CEREMONIOUS OBSERVANCES.—Tea making and drinking is a serious thing in Japan. Even the ordinary tea-making and drinking of everyday life has a ceremoniousness about it quite unknown to the Westerner. It would be thought as rude to neglect to offer tea to a visitor on his arrival as not to speak to him. The making of tea has in most cases been the work of men. By the old etiquette a Japanese gentleman never entrusted to any servant the making of tea, nor did he allow himself to exercise the fine art of that simple process unseen. The *cha-no-ya* tea is the most ceremonious of all Japanese usages. To begin with, a different tea, a tea-powder, is used and a separate set of utensils, which are never brought out except on rare occasions. Formerly this was so important a function that a tea-house was built especially for it, or a room in the dwelling-house was set apart and never desecrated by any other gathering. The rules and regulations governing the making, serving and drinking of the *cha-no-ya* are laid down, even the topics of conversation and the order in which they are to be introduced.

TOLD BY AN ANGLER.—The only fish I know that seems to have any affection for its young is the catfish. Other fish disregard their young altogether—will even eat them at times—but not so with the "catty." The first time I discovered this good trait was last summer. I was angling in a mill dam, and in the clear water I saw a host of little catfish, accompanied by two adults. The adults—husband and wife, no doubt—watched over the babies with anxious care. They darted in this direction and in that, keeping the coast clear, and if a stranger fish approached they ruffled up and fought it off like lions. They did a thing that indicated great intelligence in them when they saw me. "Happening to glance up and catch my eyes, they feared that I meant me chief, and instantly they sank to the bottom and thrashed the mud about with their tails, thus creating an opaque cloud wherein their young and they were invisible. Since that time I have often seen catfish with their young. There have been two adults in each case to look after the small fry, and in the presence of some great danger the opaque cloud of mud has always been drawn about the brood."

## KIT

By EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS

Author of "Unseen Fires," "Woman Against Woman," "Her Mistake, etc., etc.

## CHAPTER IX.

IT turned with a start when he spoke to her. She looked at him in a dazed sort of way for a moment, and then remembrance came to her, and with this remembrance came other memories; and as the difficulty of the position broke in on her she felt her pale cheeks grow crimson for an instant. Maurice had taken off his hat and was holding out his hand.

"You don't remember me, I am afraid? I hope you will forgive me for stopping you, but I felt I must come and speak to you, and try to thank you for all you did for me the other day, down at Thornton."

Kit just put her fingers into his hand.

"I—I hope you are better," she said, her voice faint and uncertain. Her heart was beating fast. Oh, why had she come out? and why should this have happened? She felt almost like crying, she was so tired and weak. Her eyes had the look of a hunted animal in them, but they were wondrously beautiful, and she was strangely picturesque and attractive. Not even the common black bonnet and ugly, shapeless black cloak could hide this fact from Maurice Montgomery's critical gaze. In fact, for once in his life, he forgot to be critical, and looked at the picture without regard for the setting.

"Oh, I am much better, though not very strong on this ankle just for a little while. Are you going to sit down in the Park? May I find you a chair? There are one or two over there under the trees—it looks pleasant and shady."

But Kit drew back.

"I—I have no time to sit down, thank you. I must go."

She began to move away, but Maurice did not intend to lose sight of her so quickly. His curiosity was roused, and something else too. He was immensely attracted by this girl, so uncommon in her beauty, and with some mystery about her. Moreover, as he had broken an appointment on purpose to speak to her, it was hardly likely he should not try and achieve that purpose.

"You are staying in London?" he asked, quickly.

Kit nodded her head. She was greatly distressed—her loyalty to Constance made her unhappy now. She felt, and felt truly, her cousin would be greatly annoyed at this episode.

"I heard you were in Paris," Captain Montgomery said, turning and walking slowly beside her, for she would move on. "You see, I was not absolutely ungrateful. I did not forget my nurse, who came to my rescue so kindly and so well."

"I did nothing," Kit said, and then she rallied her courage. "I am glad you are better. You—you ought not to walk too much, I am sure. I think it will do you harm. I—I hope you will forgive me. I must go now. Good-bye!"

She walked away rapidly, and Maurice frowned. He could not follow her quickly on account of his foot, but he followed as quickly as he could, nevertheless, and, hailing a hansom, he got in, directing the man to go slowly down the street in front of them, along which Kit's slight figure was hurrying swiftly.

It did not enter her head to imagine he would follow her. To her honest mind such a course of action would have been distinctly dishonourable; she was, indeed, gradually allowing a certain relief to steal over her. The danger was over for the moment, but in future she must be very careful. She must go out only when it was dark, and she would wear a veil. She had never thought of the possibility of being recognised in so vast a

place as London—London, a world of streets and houses, and people that seemed to be innumerable an endless. Her walk, brief as it was, had done her a little good; she felt refreshed for the mouthful of air; but she was exceedingly glad when she reached the area gate, and had slowly but surely descended the stone steps.

Maurice Montgomery watched her descent with knit brows, and muttered an inflammatory exclamation under his breath. He was more puzzled, more curious, and more interested than he had ever been in his life. He stopped his cab and waited a few minutes. Perhaps she had only gone into the house on some errand, and would come out again. He waited about fifteen minutes on the whole, and then directed the hansom driver to take him to one of his numerous clubs. He had lost an important engagement through this sudden meeting with Kit, but he scarcely even remembered that; he was occupied in wondering all sorts of things about her, and in trying to clear up the mystery.

"One thing is very certain," he said to himself, as he drove along, "and that is that Lady Sinclair's 'angel' is capable of telling a good lie. She can do it cleverly, too, for I, for one, entirely believed in the story of the school in Paris. What can it be? Has the girl done anything wrong? Is she in disgrace? She looked horribly frightened when I saw her. Her eyes are lovely—never saw anything like them! It's a strange face. She was not nearly so pretty to-day, but she looked white and ill, and she is evidently in trouble. I feel an interest in her."

Captain Montgomery mused on in his most autocratic manner, as though the mere fact of his interest endowed Kit with some great attraction. "Confess I don't understand it. Why is she here, and why did she go down the kitchen steps of the Leiths' house, and why did that cold-faced paragon of virtue tell such a stunning falsehood about her? I shall have to find out more about this!" And then Captain Montgomery reached his club, and went in to find a goodly budget of letters, all more or less in a fashionable feminine handwriting, awaiting his perusal. He soon got through them, and, seating himself at a table, began the task of answering them. They were nearly all invitations, and to most of them this successful and handsome young man was compelled to send a negative answer. There was one, however, which did not share this fate. Maurice read it through twice.

"Dear Lady Grace,—Thank you so much for your kind invitation. I shall be delighted to dine with you on Thursday evening. I look forward with much pleasure to seeing you again. Thanks for your inquiries. My unfortunate ankle is better, though I am still a cripple. With kindest remembrances to yourself and Miss Sybil—Yours very sincerely,

"MAURICE MONTGOMERY."

He folded and addressed the note to Lady Grace Leith, 20, Mayfair Square, W., and tossed it on the heap of other letters.

"Beastly dinner; everything cold; but it is politic, and Sybil is charming." And then Maurice suddenly remembered Kit. "And, by Jove! I might be able to find out something about that girl. I can get all I want to know through Sybil."

After that, the remembrance of "that girl" faded out of Captain Montgomery's mind. He had so much to do, to dress, and dine, and go to the opera, and show up at two or three balls, where his lameness would be depicted in the most flattery manner, and he himself be the recipient of the most tender sympathy.

Twice, however, in the evening Kit's existence was recalled to him. First by the slight

resemblance between her and one of the singers at the opera, and, secondly, by a remark from a young man, one of his town associates, who boldly asked him who the deuce the very pretty red-haired girl was—he had been seen walking with in the park that afternoon. A nursing sister, or something of that sort, wasn't she?

Maurice made some laughing remark; but Kit went up in his estimation at once. He was the sort of man who prized what the world prized.

He dismissed the subject, but did not negative the notion of the nursing sister. Until he knew more about Kit, and what her position was in Lady Grace Leith's house, he preferred to imagine her in some light different to that in which he knew he should undoubtedly find her.

He thought of her a little more as he drove home very late to his rooms, and a thrill of passion, not sentiment, shot through his heart as he conjured up the young face, with its pale skin, its red lips, and its marvellous eyes.

"If she is friendless, and needs help, why should not I be her friend?" he said; and he imagined he was thinking a most noble and pure-minded thought.

Maurice was egoist to such an extent that he even blinded himself to what he really meant, said, or did.

He was not absolutely a bad nature; he was only intensely selfish, narrow-minded, prejudiced, and pugnacious English. He had several good points, and would have had more had not his selfishness spread itself like a veil over all his character, and clouded the whole.

Had he been true to himself and true to his manhood, he would never even have let such a thought come into his mind. He would have known the truth, the fallacy, and the danger of such a proposal.

Friendship between a man and a woman is always more or less an anomaly in this case, taking everything into consideration—it was an impossibility.

But Maurice Montgomery had yet to learn the meaning of the word impossible where his desires and inclinations were concerned. He had never thwarted or denied them yet, and he certainly had no intention of beginning to do so now.

## CHAPTER X.

"I want to know all about you. I am sure you are very unhappy, Kate. Your name is Kate, isn't it? And you don't look strong. Don't think me inquisitive, but I should like to help you if I could!"

The speaker was a bright-looking girl; she could not be called exactly pretty, but she was undeniably charming, with a sparkle in her grey eyes, and a perpetual smile hovering round the corners of her mouth.

One could easily understand the popularity which Sybil Leith possessed the instant one looked at her. She had that which is sometimes almost as great a power as beauty—a nameless fascination, a sympathy that none could resist.

She might not attract immediately, amid a crowd of more lovely faces; but she held her kingdom once it was hers, and her power increased instead of diminishing.

It was a miracle how she came to be the child of such parents—Sir George Leith, pompous, selfish, irritable; Lady Grace, cold, equally selfish, worldly, hard, and unsympathetic.

Out of four daughters, Sybil alone possessed the nature so utterly unlike that belonging to her parents. Her three sisters, all most satisfactorily married, had resembled their mother minutely. Her one brother was the fac-simile of her father. Where and wherefore Sybil should have been so different is one of those mysterious questions to which one will never find an answer.

The only thing that was certain was that Sybil was different, and these discussions ended.



"SUPPOSE I DO NOT KNOW YOU YET, IS THAT ANY REASON WHY I SHOULD NOT GROW TO KNOW YOU?" SAID MAURICE MONTGOMERY.

She was sitting in her pretty bedroom now, clad in a blue dressing gown, with her hair loose on her shoulders, undergoing the manipulation of brushing from the girl who stood just behind.

Sybil Leith was one of those generous beings of the feminine sex, who can admire another of that same sex without the faintest scintillation of jealousy.

The not only admired Kit, she had straight-way fallen in love with her. She thought he had never seen anyone so sweet, so uncommon, so beautiful before.

She sat staring in the glass, apparently lost in contemplation of her own image, in reality gazing at the reflection of Kit's pale subdued face, with its sorrowful expression and its marvellous colouring.

It had been almost too great a relief to Kit, this meeting with the girl on whom it was her duty to attend, and finding her so unlike all the rest of the world with whom she had come in contact since her new life had begun.

As Sybil had fallen in love with her, so Kit had fallen a victim to the other's charming and womanly nature. It was a case of mutual affinity.

Sybil was perplexed and worried too about her new maid.

"She is absolutely a lady, refined as she is beautiful. She is so young, and yet she is so unhappy. It does not seem right that one person should be so unhappy while another has so much."

And then Sybil Leith would glance with a blush to her writing-table studded with some half dozen photographs of her chosen and best-liked friends.

Her eyes always went to one picture in a silver frame—a handsome stalwart young man in a smart uniform—with a signature in the corner, just two letters, "M.M.", and a date.

The mere fact of looking at this portrait, gave Sybil pleasure and revived the know-

ledge of her happiness, recalling, as it did, many a pretty little episode which she treasured in her heart of hearts.

Kit had waited on her several days before Sybil determined to speak out what was on her mind.

She was dressing for dinner now. Her mother was giving a small party, only one or two intimate friends; but Sybil was very particular about having her hair prettily done, and had told Kit to lay out one of her most becoming frocks.

Another girl might have been, not unnaturally, irritated when she found that her new maid was unequal to the task of doing her hair, but Sybil was the most considerate person in the world.

"I know you have no experience," she said to Kit, and then she sent and asked her mother's maid to come to the rescue, and told Kit she would see that she had some lessons immediately, adding, in her pretty way, "and I am sure you will be splendid at it, for you have such artistic hands, and you are in earnest."

Kit's heart swelled with pleasure, pain, and gratitude. She could not fail to be touched by Miss Leith's kindness. Poor child! she had not had too much of it in her life, and it was like some healing balm upon her troubled and sorrowful heart.

There was something about Sybil that recalled Chris. She longed so often to write to Chris, to let him know where she was, and what doing, but she had no intention of breaking her word to Constance. She would be loyal to the one who had helped her, even though that help had been in so poor a way, and she had been absolutely forgotten and neglected by her cousin since her departure.

To let Chris know anything about her would be to make Constance very angry, and give her annoyance, and this was something Kit would not do.

But, all the same, her heart went forth

very often to her old playmate, the staunch loving friend of her childhood. At moments she felt as though she would have given all she possessed—life and youth itself—to cling once to his strong, loving hands, and be conscious of the reality of his unalterable affection.

The likeness she traced in Sybil to Chris would have made her pleasant under any circumstances in Kit's eyes; but allied as it was to such tender womanliness and sympathy, it is little wonder that Kit felt a great portion of love and gratitude go out to her young mistress.

Sybil was dressed in her pretty white frock, and was drawing on her gloves, when she suddenly turned and spoke to Kit.

Dinner was not till a quarter past eight, and the hour had not chimed yet. Sybil had a shy wish not to go down too soon.

"He can have a little chat with mamma first," she thought to herself hurriedly.

Her toilette had been completed early, and Kit was busying herself putting away things. She looked round, and her face coloured suddenly as Sybil spoke to her.

"I shall call you Kate," Miss Leith went on, "it is so much prettier than Lowe. I don't like calling you by your surname. You look very pale, Kate; I think you ought to go out. I am sure a little air would do you good. Why not ask Sparks to go for a walk with you?"

Sparks was Lady Grace's maid, a very important person. She frightened Kit exceedingly.

She shrank back now from the idea.

"Oh! no—I mean, thank you very much, Miss Sybil; but I—I don't think I can go out. I have some sewing to do."

"What sewing? But you can't work all day and all night too. No one can; it is preposterous. You will be ill; and you are ill, I believe. Please don't work any more to-night, Kate."

Kit's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"You are very good," she said, brokenly.

She turned round to hang some dresses in the wardrobe, but Sybil had caught sight of her face, and it sent quite a pang through the happy girl's heart.

"Oh! dear, I wish I could do something for her," she thought. Out loud, she said, gently, "You will forgive me asking you any impudent questions, -Kate, won't you? I am only anxious about you; I can't bear to see anyone unhappy. But I won't bother you now. Perhaps, some day, when you know me a little better, you will tell me something about yourself and your life before you came here. Till that time, I should like you to know I am your friend, and if there is anything you want, anything I can do for you, I would like you to come to me. Will you make that a bargain?"

She stretched out her ungloved hand as she spoke, and Kit took it—looked it over a moment's hesitation, then bent her lips, and kissed the hand passionately.

"You are good. Oh! you are good," she said, in the same broken fashion. "I shall never be able to thank you—never! But I will be your friend all my life!"

And when she said these words, how little Kit Marlowe knew what they would cost her, what they would really mean.

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Maurice Montgomery had no necessity to question Sybil Leith in any sort of way about Kit. As though fate had ordained it, she herself gave him all the information he desired, before the long and solemn dinner had progressed more than half way.

He had noticed, immediately she entered the drawing room, that there were tear drops on her eye-lashes, and her face had a subdued, emotional expression which attracted him. He was indeed very much attracted by Sybil Leith altogether. Of course, he did not consider her pretty; in fact, he found her regrettably ordinary and rather plain than otherwise, when he sat down quietly to scan her personality; but Maurice was, as has been pointed out before, an excessively vain man, and it was therefore only in the ordinary course of things that he should be touched and gratified by the knowledge of this girl's love for him. And Sybil did love him; in her simple, earnest, true-hearted fashion she had set him up on a pedestal, and she was worshipping him with all the warmth and sincerity of her nature. She was not conscious of how clearly she betrayed this knowledge to him; she only knew that, happy as she was under ordinary circumstances, she was never so happy as when she was with Maurice. She had no discriminating powers, nor did she desire them. To her he was faultless, a man above men, something that roused the higher and better feelings in all hearts—a brave, strong, straightforward soldier of honour, as loyal in heart as in his career.

Maurice had begun to pay her attention from the first day they had met, very delicate attention, calculated to interest her and not alarm her mother. For Sybil Leith was an heiress in a small way. She not only would carry to her husband the liberal allowance set on one side for her by her rich father, but she had lately come into possession of a nice little income and property, bequeathed her by her aunt and godmother.

Consequently, Lady Grace was keenly on the alert against all possible fortune hunters and other undesirable persons, and amply made up in her anxious watch over her daughter for the indifference and carelessness with which that same daughter regarded herself and her wealth.

As a matter of fact, Sybil never thought of her money at all. Perhaps Maurice Montgomery fulfilled this mission for her—for he thought a great deal about her money, and not always in the most unselfish way.

As they sat together at dinner after Sybil had inquired tenderly and been reassured about the poor ankle, Maurice drew out, in his

most skilful and gentle way, the cause of the emotion that had been on her face when they first met. Sybil said very little to begin with, but it was impossible for her to resist the fascination of Maurice's voice and manner, and then she trusted him and believed him to be absolutely and exactly of the same calibre as herself.

She told him about Kit: how she was certain the girl was gently born, but how she had said nothing as yet, and Sybil would not question. Only she was really troubled, for the girl seemed ill, and she was sure the work and the close confinement to the house was bad for her; and then Sybil, having said so much, and finding, as she knew she should, that Maurice was so sympathetic, told how she and Kit had made friends, and how she was certain that the girl had been badly treated, but that it was evident she would say nothing and meant to bear her burden silently.

Maurice sat musing as Sybil ceased.

"It sounds very interesting and almost romantic; and how like you," with a tender inflection on the word, "to be so sweet and good. No doubt all you say is true, and I expect she is very unhappy."

"She looks wretched and so ill, and the funny thing is, I find she never goes out; she is frightened to walk alone, I suppose, and she shrinks from the other servants. I hit on a splendid plan just now. I shall give her my key of the square, and she can go there whenever she likes; in the evening, for instance, when we are all out, she could sit there and be nice and quiet. Don't you think I am clever?"

"Very clever!" he said, smiling down into her eyes, "and something more beside!" he whispered, and Sybil turned away her head and blushed a pretty rose colour, even down to her soft white throat.

It was a very happy evening. Maurice sat beside her, as she went to the piano and sang all her quaint little songs. He did not say much, but he had very eloquent eyes, and Sybil seemed to find all the words she needed in them.

They parted with a close hand-clasp. Sybil ran upstairs to her room with a heart that thrilled and throbbed with a joy that was beyond description, and Maurice Montgomery got into a cab and was driven away to a bachelor supper party. He looked keenly at the square gardens as he drove past them, and seemed to be making some sort of calculation; then he threw himself back in his corner, and a smile curled the corners of his handsome mouth—the smile of a man well satisfied with himself and with the world in general.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sybil Leith's unexpected goodness brought a gleam of sunshing into our poor little heroine's life.

The sympathy was so beautiful to her, she had no words to express all it meant to her. She gave out of her bountiful young heart the truest love, the deepest gratitude, to the girl who had given her so much.

She longed to be able to show some definite proof of her intense gratitude, yet she was silent in this. She bore herself very quietly, she would not encroach on Sybil's graciousness.

She never forgot for a moment the position she held in the house, and taught herself daily the bitter and difficult task of repression in her pride and in her feelings.

Sybil's interest in her new maid did not fail to provoke extreme jealousy among the other servants, with whom Kit could not even attempt to associate.

Her quiet dignified bearing—and it was wonderful how the natural flow of spirits had been brought into subjection by her will—would have made her unpopular under any circumstances; but when it became known that Miss Sybil had taken such a fancy to Kit Lowe, then the dissatisfaction became dislike—very definite dislike too.

Kit only drew back more and more into her shell. If it had not been for Sybil, there were moments when she told herself she could not bear the life she had to lead; but the pleasure she derived from attending on her new friend more than compensated for all her discomfort.

She loved the little chats in the pretty bedroom while she brushed Sybil's soft brown hair; and she delighted in helping the girl to dress in the evening to go to a dinner, the opera, or a ball.

Sybil had given Kit the key of the gardens in the square, and already the latter had made acquaintance with these same gardens.

She usually chose the hour when the servants were at supper, and her going and coming passed unnoticed.

Kit grew almost fond of these dingy, shabby trees and brown grass plots. She would sit there in the summer twilight, and her thoughts would go chiefly to Chris—what he was doing and what he thought of her, and if he missed her much.

Constance never wrote her a word. She never knew how her aunt had received the news of her departure, she had no hint as to what story was given to account for that departure. She felt a little sad and weary at Constance's utter neglect of her; at least she might have sent one word, but Kit never attempted to break the silence.

One evening she had dressed Sybil in a frock of delicate pink, and had watched the girl flutter down to the ball, where Lady Grace stood waiting.

There was a happy look on Sybil's face that somehow made Kit feel conscious of an ache and a void in her heart.

She did not envy her friend; she only felt a heaviness upon her as thoughts of her life would crowd into her mind. She put the room in order, and then stood at the window and sighed. She felt almost too tired to put on her hat to go out; but as the soft summer night wind came in and touched her cheeks, she rallied herself, and went to her room, dressing herself quickly.

The square was almost deserted. Later on it would be filled with carriages, for one of the big houses was decorated with striped awning that told of some reception, a big *soirée*, or a ball.

Kit unlocked the gate, and was passing in, when someone touched her on the shoulder.

"It is Miss Marlowe, is it not?" Captain Montgomery said, as she turned with a start.

Kit trembled with nervousness and a little fear. Then there came a swift thought of Constance.

"Do not call me by that name," she said, hurriedly. "I—I am Kate Lowe. I—do—not—"

Maurice hastened to reassure her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in his most courteous way. "I am so sorry I made a mistake."

To himself he was thinking that now, more than ever, there was some mystery, or why should she be masquerading in a false name? He pushed the gate open for her to pass through, and followed her quite easily, letting the latch click behind him.

"These gardens are a wonderful invention," he said, walking beside her timid, hesitating figure.

He still had to use a stick, but his lameness did not detract from his appearance, rather it gave him additional interest.

"I am afraid," he began, determining to start matters on a frank footing; "I am afraid, Miss Lowe, you think me a very unceremonious person intruding on you in this way; but, you see, I cannot forget how kind you were to me, and I have had such a longing to join you in your little evening walks." He laughed slightly. "Now, I daresay you wonder how I know you do walk in the evening. Well, I will make a confession. I have been here in this square nearly every night this week, and I have watched you come into

these gardens, and have envied you your quiet hour of thought, and wished I might be allowed to join you, as I have done to-night?" Kit felt a strange thrill run throughout her.

"You have watched me?" she said, wonderingly, softly.

He answered "Yes," only making the word as tender as he possibly could.

The girl looked at him out of her beautiful, uncomprehending eyes. Her hair was a little ruffled on her brows. The rising moon touched her pale face with its cold radiance, drawing a nameless loveliness out of those marvellous eyes. Maurice Montgomery felt his pulses quickened.

It was not love that stirred his heart, for such a heart as he possessed could not possibly know the meaning of the word love in its truest, purest, most exquisite sense; but, nevertheless, he called it love to himself, and he let its fascination steal over his practical mind, blind his shrewd eyes, and deafen the voice of his worldly-wise reason.

"Is it so strange that I should do this?" he asked her, as they walked on under the trees.

The girl quivered at his voice, and wondered in a shy, vague way why her heart should throb and beat so fast, and why her eyes felt so heavy that she could not lift them to the handsome face bending so tenderly above her.

"I—I think it is," she said, speaking nervously, "I—you don't know me, and—and—"

"And what?" he asked, gently. "Suppose I do not know you yet, is that any reason why I should not grow to know you? You helped me once when I needed help; now—forgive me, will you not, if I hurt you? but I feel somehow you may need help—only the help of sympathy, of comprehension, the help of a friend, and—and I should love to give this to you if I might!"

Kit's glorious eyes filled with tears suddenly.

"How good you are," she said, brokenly, "how good!"

Maurice stretched out his hand.

"Little girl," he said, softly, "shall we be friends? You do not know much of me, but I will try to make you like me, and—and I will try to give you happiness if I can. I know you have some trouble, that there is sadness in your young heart, but I do not ask you to tell me of it yet; some day, when we are quite old friends, 'This is all I have to say. This is why I have watched and waited for an opportunity to speak to you. Will you forgive me? Will you say you are not angry?"

Kit said nothing, only put her slender hand into his with a courage that was born of intense gratitude to him, and some other feeling now, deep, intense—a feeling that was laden with joy she had never felt before. And as she stood there in the moonlight, sealing the compact of their friendship with that silent, eloquent hand-clasp, Sir Philip Desmond was waiting, with an impatient frown on his brow, at his club, for Maurice, to keep an appointment with him; and Sybil Leith, standing in a crowded drawing-room trying to chat and be at her ease, was counting the minutes with passionate eagerness for the hour when she would enter the ball-room at a very grand house where Maurice Montgomery would be awaiting her, to sit beside her all the evening—and, who could say?—perhaps to whisper in her ear in some quiet corner the words her heart already knew so well and cherished so dearly.

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,079. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.

**WOMAN DRESS REFORMER.**—We have worked hard in the great movement to emancipate women from the tyranny of dress, and we are on the eve of a glorious victory. There is only one drop of bitterness in our cup of joy. Friend: "What is it?" "The fact that the women of the country won't accept our ideas."

## Abominable People.

By UNCLE BENJAMIN.

Of all the people from whom we pray to be delivered, deliver us from those who are always seeing resemblances!

Everybody knows them—you all have one or more of them among your acquaintances.

When they come into your presence, they put on their glasses—most of them wear glasses—and subject you to as rigid an inspection as they would subject a horse which they thought of purchasing, and which was suspected of being spavined or foundered.

They will examine the texture of your skin, the droop of your eyelids, the curve of your mouth, and the freckles on your nose, and by the time you are nervous enough to fly, they will come out with an opinion.

"Why, bless me! how much you resemble your Uncle Aaron!"

Sometimes your grandfather, or father, or Aunt Polly, or Sally, is the one to whom it is said you bear a resemblance, and, as a general thing, all these relatives are very ugly, and, of course, you feel intensely flattered. It is the business of these abominable people to make you feel that you are a monstrosity.

They will expatiate on your appearance, and wonder if you are well.

Don't you look a little yellow around the eyes? Are you sure you are not bilious? You ought to take some bitters. Then they will want to know if you are as fleshy as usual, and they will exclaim because you are fat, or because you are lean, as the case may be.

If you have a small waist, they will suggest tight-lacing; if a large one, they will ask if you are not afraid of dying of the dropsy. And they will remember some remote ancestor of yours who had it.

If you are getting past thirty, they will ask if you dye your hair, or suggest that your false teeth make you look ten years younger.

Then they will begin to reckon up your age by the birth of Mr. Jones's Ned, or Mr. Robinson's Ellen, or by the cold Friday, or the hot Monday, or some other event of equal importance, and equally well fixed in the calendar.

You are too pale, or too red; you should wear green, or pink, or blue; in short, any colour but the one you have on. That is dreadfully unbecoming!

When they have done with your personal appearance, they will turn their attention to your friends and relatives. If you have any relations who are not quite respectable—and who has not?—they will be particularly anxious to know about these same relatives.

Has your cousin Dick secured a divorce from his wife yet? or, is it really so, that your husband's uncle's cousin's wife is suspected of poisoning her mother-in-law?

Then they sigh, and roll up their eyes, and advise you not to feel bad about it, and inform you that nobody is responsible for what their relations do.

And, if you are a man, you feel as if you would like to kick them soundly; and if you are a woman, you wish their grandfather had been hung, so you could twit them of it.

But there is no redress, and it is one of the evils that must be borne.

A GENTLEMAN was once making a pedestrian excursion in a wild rural district. Feeling rather hungry, he looked at his watch to see if it were nearly dinner-time, but found that it had stopped. Just then, happening to meet with a country boy, he asked him: "What time is it, my lad?" The youngster answered: "Just twelve, sir." "Only twelve?" said the gentleman; "I thought it was more." "It's never any more in these parts, sir," said the boy, simply; "it begins again at one."

## Gems

It sometimes happens that the man who owns his house his castle has the most in his eye:

If every man is the architect of his own destiny he should pay particular attention to fire escapes.

HAVE a purpose in life, and, having it, throw such strength of mind and muscle into your work as God has given you.

THE universe is as full of truth and goodness as it is of light. And no more surely does the constant day return alike to the "just and the unjust" than true lives will rebuke our untruly, earnest opportunities rebuke our reluctant sloth of spirit by their brave and cheerful solicitudes.

THE two most precious things on this side of the grave are our reputation and our life. But it is to be lamented that the most contemptible whisper may deprive us of one, and the weakest weapon of the other. A wise man, therefore, will be more anxious to deserve a fair name than to possess it.

THE pleasures of vice are often real, but they are commonly transient, and they leave legacies of suffering, weakness, or care behind them. The nobler pleasures for the most part grow and strengthen with advancing years. It is in the long forecast of life that the superiority of virtue, as an element of happiness, becomes most apparent.

A MOTHER should not live for her children, but with them. She should keep abreast of the times in reading, and enter into the better brain-life of her little ones, leading them up step by step, instead of lagging behind them, and being considered by them to be more of a servant than a companion. Most men who have achieved greatness in the eyes of the world give to their mothers the credit for their start and stimulus.

## THE MOTHER'S WORLD

Mark how the mother's gentle hand

Retains its pleasing sway—

How mild reproof and kind command

The little ones obey;

While to their prattle innocent—

Their romps and merry games,

Her loving heart yields free assent,

Nor their wild transports blames.

Their home, to her, a world appears,

And there its dearest charms,

Where each, in trouble or in tears,

Finds refuge in her arms;

Where each its childish rapture shares

With her it loves the best—

With her whose image sweet it wears

Upon the heart impressed.

Though sweet the love her children feel

Poured out in plenitude—

A love that lapsing years reveal,

With steadfast strength induced—

For him, the husband and the sire!

No space or time shall dim,

No long extended absence tire

Her loyal love for him!

See joy's soft finger touch her face

On his return at night,

While business sweet each other chase,

The tell-tales of delight!

Oh, there is not a nobler scene,

Or one of purer bliss—

Or one more lovely and serene,

In all the world than this!

Tom Noddy: "Uncle Amos, I hear you said I was a fool the other day." Uncle Amos: "I never said you were a fool the other day. I said you had been a fool all the days of your life."

# JUDITH

## CHAPTER XXIII.

HE Commissioner's office stood in his compound, only the tennis courts intervening between it and the flower-beds that were arranged round the portico of the front door. From the drawing-room windows there was an uninterrupted view of the building, so that Judith, standing there the following morning, could not help noting the unusual sight of a lady walking up to the entrance and being instantly admitted. Even a momentary glance determined it to be Mrs. Trevor, for not only did she habitually affect white in her garments and large straw hats that her detractors were fond of declaring would have been more suitable to a woman half her age, but she had a tripping gait that could not easily be mistaken; and Judith felt some uneasiness as to whether the visit would not prove to be connected with the appeal she had made the day before, wishing earnestly that she had taken the precaution of extracting a pledge of secrecy when she spoke.

If this were indeed so—if the knowledge she possessed were to be betrayed to Mr. Sherston, and through him to the very man it was most necessary to keep in the dark on the subject—then all her schemes would be in vain, for forewarned in this case would be forearmed.

He would hurry on the marriage, and thus render futile all her attempts to collect proofs; for whatever happened, and however great her own cause for wrath, she could never avenge herself on Winifred's husband. This he would guess, and was certainly not above trading on the fact. She was aroused from her disturbed thoughts by a convulsive grip upon her arm.

It was Mrs. Sherston, who had been standing there some time, but who only now put in words the question that had been burning on her lips.

"Who was it?" she asked, her sharp-featured face looking more than ordinarily stern from the repression of emotion that she felt.

"It was Mrs. Trevor," answered Judith.

Mrs. Sherston relinquished her grasp, and moved away. Judith thought that she had left the room, but when she turned to look round presently she saw her sitting in her usual chair with some embroidery in her hand, which she seemed to be working with her ordinary precision. She became conscious of Judith's glance at once.

"Don't go away, Miss Holt, if you have nothing particular to do. Watch there, and let me know when Mrs. Trevor leaves. I have something to say to her."

Wondering a little at the request, yet glad on her own account to discover whether this was merely a friendly visit, or with a serious object referring to herself and her unfortunate application, Judith obeyed. So, for nearly an hour, she stood and waited, while in the centre of the room Mrs. Sherston counted her stitches aloud in a phlegmatic tone, meant to assure the hearer of her own perfect indifference to what was going on.

Then Mrs. Trevor left, emerging as she had entered—alone; and Judith, too, moved from her point of espionage.

"She is going. Shall I run out and call her myself, or send a servant?" she asked.

"Do neither. It does not matter. I can write a note," was the curt rejoinder, the work still progressing, and with apparently deep attention lavished on it.

But when Judith went out the needle dropped from her fingers; and her watch,

which had several times been stealthily consulted, was again drawn from her belt, while a quick frown contracted her brows as she saw how long a period had elapsed.

It is a mistake to suppose jealousy only a folly of youth. No time in life can its pangs be so acute as when reason can give no comforting assurance, and faith must rest poised on her own divine wings, with no foundation for her feet on earth.

A woman's empire, depending chiefly on charms that the years destroy, is at best a very short one; and if unhappily she has not managed during that brief season to rivet the chains, which then are easily forged, with a strength calculated to endure, even when the brightness of metal has ceased to dazzle and delight, she can hope little from after efforts.

When Mrs. Sherston married, it had been without love, and from the first she had only endeavoured to influence her husband's actions in so far as they concerned herself, and her small ambitions; not attempting to gain a firm hold on his affections.

She had been bright and amusing in those days—a good dancer, a beautiful rider, and had not lacked admirers; but afterwards, when bad health robbed her of her good looks, and had accentuated the sharpness of repartee into actual ill-nature, these failed her, and she turned naturally to the man she had married for his society and sympathy.

Then it was, with something more than mere discomfiture, she realised that the slight fancy he had had for her—born of pique and wounded pride—had been utterly destroyed by her indifference, and that it would never be revived, his thoughts having in the meantime drifted back into their old channel.

The only woman he had ever loved, yet whom, from loyalty to his brother, he had voluntarily renounced, had also married in the interval, and perhaps had she been happy in her choice he would more easily have resigned himself to the inevitable; but John Trevor was by no means a pattern spouse, and clung to the habits of his bachelorhood from the very outset, never allowing a thought of his young wife to restrain him from indulgence in any favourite pursuit.

Nearly all the leave he could procure he spent in Cashmere, penetrating into the wilds beyond Yarkund and Leh, so that even had she been inclined she could scarcely have accompanied him; while even in cantonments his leisure hours were mostly occupied in playing racquets or polo, and for the last year he had been in Burmah, having volunteered as transport officer for duty.

Since their parting, twenty-three years before, the Commissioner and Lilian Trevor had not met until some eighteen months ago chance had once again thrown them in the same station.

The time that had elapsed and the changes which that time had brought might reasonably be supposed to have done away with all question of danger in the meeting; but Mrs. Sherston's jealousy, having shouldered all this while, burst into sudden flame on being confronted with her rival.

Carefully disguising her real feelings, she embarked at once into a sort of patronising friendship for the slighty, yet not ill-intentioned grass-widow, and lost no opportunity of flaunting her prosperity before her gaze.

To every elaborate entertainment she was invariably bidden, as well as to the more unceremonious parties which were given; but up to this date Mrs. Sherston had never succeeded in discovering any sign or symptom of intimacy between her and her husband.

So far as she knew, and in the matter she had been Argus-eyed, they had never exchanged a syllable in private.

This deliberate seeking of him in his office staggered her from its very audacity, and she was at a loss how to circumvent such a daring move, startled, too, to find how deeply she herself was concerned therewith.

Nor was Mr. Sherston less surprised when raising his eyes from a paper in which he had been earnestly engrossed he beheld before him the woman whom he had loved all his life, but from whom he had been divided more absolutely by the canons of conventionality than by any barriers of distance.

While he rose awkwardly from his chair and with a vanity of which he was scarcely conscious removed his pince-nez, the reflected chuprasse who had ushered her in withdrew, leaving them alone.

She stood there, hesitating how to explain to him the reason of her visit, and a warm blush mounting to her face made it look quite young and pretty in the shadow of her big hat.

Even had his sight been clearer than it was he would have seen no lines about the mouth that once he had so fondly kissed, no wrinkles round the eyes that had once looked such tenderness into his own.

A charm was over him for the moment, and he could not help fancying that all that had happened in his life since they parted in anger was a dream, and he need only now concern himself about the reality of her presence. At a word he would have thrown himself at her feet and declared himself unchanged, in spite of all that had passed.

But she did not share the enthusiasm of his delusion, was not even conscious of it.

In her own case a strenuous, constant effort to appear young, not entirely disdaining the aid of art, might help to deceive him for the moment; but there was nothing in the tall, thin and elderly man who waited, glasses in hand, for her to speak, to remind her of the young lover who had wooed her so ardently, renounced her so remorselessly, years ago.

"You must think it very strange, my coming here," she began.

He handed her a chair, and with somewhat stilted politeness assured her she was welcome, that he would be only too happy to serve her in any way.

"You mistake," she interrupted, quickly. "I would not ask your help if I were dying! It was to help you, to warn you of a threatened danger, I came here."

He went over to the door, which still stood ajar, and closed it carefully; then returning sat down in his former place, prepared to listen to what she had to say.

When Judith first mentioned Stranghan's name he had expected more to follow, though then no definite fear was in his mind as to the knowledge she might possess. Now he felt it had only been the beginning of the end—the first faint cloud that might spread and darken his whole horizon.

He was not surprised, nor did he move a muscle of his face, as Mrs. Trevor went on: "I have always known that Mr. Johnson was no other than your old clerk, Michael Stranghan, the man who absconded to escape an inquiry that was being raised then—the Chahpore bribery case, you know. I recognised him at once; but so long as it was only I who knew it did not matter, for I would not betray you!"

Even in his keen anxiety to know what other held this weapon against him he could not help being thrilled by the tone of her voice as it rang out clear and musical in her asseveration.

For the moment the identity of the Mrs. Trevor he had met in friendly intercourse for

the last eighteen months was submerged in that of Lilian Grey he had not seen for twenty-three years. So she had protested then her love and truth, and he had not believed her.

"Who else knows?" he asked, feeling the necessity of putting away from him the folly of such thoughts, and almost relieved to find that in asking the question his interest in the answer intensified and grew.

"Miss Holt, your daughter's companion. She came to me and ask me to support her in a charge against Mr. Johnson. I refused to do so."

"Why?"

"Because it would have injured you. Even at the time of that inquiry there were some who said that if Straughan were guilty you must have been implicated too; and if it were known that he were under your roof now, bearing an assumed name, an honoured guest and engaged to marry your daughter, those vague suspicions which were ripe then would become certainties."

She kept her face turned away from him, not wishing to see him wince beneath her words. Though she had judged it better to say out the whole truth at once she could not bring herself to look upon his shame; the memory of the old days was too present with her then.

Indeed, I doubt if a woman can ever divest the man she once loved of the halo which that love cast round him; and despite the love of pleasure, the craving for admiration which had become to her a second nature, Lilian Trevor was at heart a very woman still. She could never quite forget the one romance of her otherwise frivolous lifetime.

The Commissioner had become ashen-grey in his pallor; no one knew better than he that once an accusation is breathed, even so lightly, it only takes a little time for it to become substantiated, and the idea that a secret known to two women could remain a secret long he would have laughed to scorn. Yet just then he could not concentrate his thoughts on the danger of his own position, so strong was his curiosity to account for her action in the matter.

Was it from a tardy desire to avenge for the past she came now and warned him of the threatened blow; or had she been moved by mere womanly caprice, a desire to have some influence upon his fate?

"And why—" he began, falteringly, then broke off altogether. But she understood what was in his mind.

"Why have I interfered? Why am I here? I wonder if you will believe me now when I tell you that it is because I loved you years ago, though then you doubted, and thought I cared for your money, your position."

"And did you not?" he asked, but had the grace to look ashamed when she flashed upon him a quick, scornful glance.

"It is scarcely worth while making protestations now, and yet all these years I have been longing for an opportunity of proving to you that I loved you for yourself, that for no other reason would I have jilted your brother."

"So you told me once before."

The accent of hesitation in his tone she answered by drawing out Gerald Sherston's letter from her pocket, and placing it in his hand, watching him read it, not speaking until with trembling fingers he laid it on the table beside him. Then she explained.

"It was Miss Holt brought it to me yesterday. Chance has thrown them together, and, at his advice, she asked my aid. You see he offers me a strong inducement to help her in saying that it will be a reparation for the injury he suffered at my hands. How deep that injury was you know. It is possible you have seen him lately. I saw him only a short time ago, and could guess something of what

he had gone through in the cruel lines upon his face. He was terribly changed—terribly!"

"Poor Jerry!" interpolated the Commissioner, softly.

Perhaps she did not hear, for she went on quickly—

"You know if I am very hard-hearted. I think even if you doubted the motive of my act you never doubted that I was repentant when I heard how it affected him, and of what madness it was the cause. You remember I was very ill, and for long, long afterwards his face haunted me; even in sleep I could not escape the memory of it, for I knew it was I who had wrecked his life, I who was responsible for his wretchedness and guilt. This letter came as a great temptation. Always I had prayed that some day I might be able to atone, and when the chance came—I let it go by. Stronger than my desire to please him was the wish to show you beyond dispute that it was you I loved always, only you. Do you believe it now?"

"Yes, I believe you," he said, sadly, with not a trace of exultation in his tone.

After all, what did it matter at this period of their lives whether she had been true to him or no? He almost believed he would have preferred to think her false still than be weighed down by the thought that, but for his own incredulity, they might have been together all these years, happy notwithstanding the gloomy shadow which the misfortune of another must have thrown over both.

"You cannot blame me," he said, querulously. "You had deceived me once in not telling me you were engaged to my own brother; it was not to be wondered at that when I heard the truth I should think you had deceived me doubly, that for mercenary reasons, not for love, you had allowed me to supplant poor Jerry."

"I never blamed you. I think I liked you all the better for your loyalty to him. But I am glad you know the truth now."

She rose slowly from her seat as she spoke. The colour which excitement had brought to her face had faded, and her face looked pinched and worn. It was far easier for the Commissioner to realise the flight of time now than it had been on her first entrance, when the momentary glow had made her look more youthful, and he was taken by surprise.

"May I keep this?" he asked, soberly, tapping the letter with his fingers.

"It is no good to me. What shall you do in the matter?"

"I hardly know; it is difficult to decide what is best. Do you know what animus that girl has against Mr. Johnson?"

"She is only anxious to prevent his marriage with Winifred. If the engagement were broken off I believe he would have nothing to fear from her."

He sighed and passed his hand with a gesture of utter weariness through his hair; and so deeply was she moved to pity that she crossed over to his side, and her fingers closed with a tight, warm pressure over his as they lay upon the table.

"I am very sorry for you. I wish you well through it all!" she murmured indistinctly, looking down with infinite compassion into his thin face, on which anxiety had worn more lines than age.

With mute gratitude he returned her gaze, feeling that it would be impossible to say out all that was in his heart, and certainly unwise.

The caress had recalled old tendernesses the memory of which made him yearn as he had never done before for womanly sympathy and love; at the same time a keen remorse filled him for the injustice he had inflicted on her, while admiring the patience with which she had suffered it and completely vindicated herself at last.

His sight was dimmed with an unwanted moisture, and, as he lifted his hand to clear it, she passed from the room with an almost inaudible "good-bye."

When he looked up again she was gone, the door closed behind her; his eyes fell instead upon a frame on his writing-table that contained the portrait of his wife, hard-featured and cold, in spite of the self-complacent smile which, for the occasion, she had adopted; and so marked was the contrast between what "might have been" and what unhappily was, that out of the very bitterness of his soul he laughed aloud.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

There comes a time in the life of every man when the pleasures of his bachelor life seem to pall; and, however brilliant may have been the existence he has led, it appears stale and profitless in comparison with purer, if more conventional, domestic joys.

In Colonel Lea-Creagh's case this crisis had been very long in coming. He had always prided himself on being a butterfly, and impervious to the attractions that young girls possessed for some, but not for him. Not Byron himself felt more scorn of the prettiness of the bread-and-butter type than did he; moreover, he had had some reason to plume himself upon the conquests he had made of quite as pretty, and more piquant, older women. Not always had he been, as he was now, corpulent and pompous; there had been a time when he was as popular as any officer in the mounted arm of the service, when he had been able to depend completely on his personal attributes, and needed not his other recommendations of money and a good position.

That he had not realised when this time was over was an error, and no uncommon one. Can any one deliberately decide when their own youth is past, when their own good looks are waning? It is seldom indeed that the date is not fixed at a considerably later period than others would have fixed it for us.

But latterly Lea-Creagh had experienced some faint misgivings on this subject. It may have been that his patent admiration for Judith made him less warmly welcomed by other women; but certainly he found them more unwilling to be monopolised by him, more chary, too, of accepting his presents—for he was naturally generous to a fault, and may have also found it diplomatic to supplement his attentions with more solid advantages. However this might have been, his fears were aroused—the dread of a lonely old age constantly recurring, and spoiling his delight in the good things that were still at his disposal. He pictured himself a superannuated bachelor about town, with none of the prestige that now surrounded him as colonel of a crack cavalry corps; and a vision of the life that might be his were Judith to become his wife seemed even more alluring by the contrast. To do him justice, he was honestly fond of the girl—honestly desirous of rescuing her from the dependent position in which he guessed she was not happy, and by giving her all that he possessed brightening her lot.

It was not till the day of their interview with Gerald Sherston that any definite intention of asking her to marry him was formed in his mind; but the more he thought the matter out, the more convinced he became that it would be for the happiness of both were the idea to be consummated, and his fascination grew.

The next time he saw her they were at a gymkhana, she listening, with what the Colonel thought considerable eagerness, to Captain St. Quentin as he talked to her.

That their conversation was about the races he did not doubt, and was conscious of some

twinges of regret that he himself had no knowledge on the subject.

In spite of his profession, and though his name was enrolled as a matter of course among the stewards at every local meeting, he was by no means a horseman—scarcely, indeed, knew one pony from another, and had hitherto been sufficiently brave to avow the fact.

Now, for the first time, he felt his deficiencies in this respect as he noted her evident interest, and the quick gaze with which she followed the ponies as they cantered along the course.

Captain St. Quentin was the owner of several racers, one of which he was riding in a steeple-chase, and wore his silk jacket underneath a light overcoat.

"I wish I could ride them all, but I am too heavy," he was saying to his companion, while Judith looked vaguely sympathetic, not quite comprehending how far it was a case for pity.

Winifred's little terrier was seated on his hind legs, waving his paws with the desolate air of one who finds himself alone in a crowd.

Several times he had been made to leave his mistress by main force; and though when actually away he enjoyed the running about, he did so under protest, and never of his own free will would leave the sick room.

Now, with a low whine, he called attention to his hard fate, and Judith took a biscuit from a tray which was handed to her by a kit-matghar with tea and coffee, and gave it to him in bits.

"He is so miserable now Winifred is ill, and won't leave her for a moment if he can help it. Poor little Dandy!" she said, and, stooping, stroked his long, white, silky hair.

"I wish you would bestow your pity elsewhere; it is sorely needed! Are you never sorry for me?—that day after day I can never see you nor speak to you, though I manœuvre all I know?"

"It was only the other day—" she began.

"A week ago!" he interrupted, soornfully, and his eloquent blue eyes rested on her glowing face in keenest admiration. "May I go for a walk with you again some morning? May 1?"

She shook her head.

"Why not?" he pleaded, insistently.

She thought the question in bad taste, and frowned a little, even while she blushed in answer.

"There is something so vulgar in an assignation, so unladylike!" she was explaining, when he interrupted.

"Yet you met me once!"

All the colour faded from her face, the frown deepened, and her lips tightened in a resolution not to reply.

How he had disenchanted her by his thoughtless reminder of an indiscretion she had already repented in the bitterness of sack-cloth and ashes, he never guessed, and went on in the same tone of persuasion he had adopted throughout.

"Won't you come, Miss Holt? I have so much, so very much, to say to you."

"I am afraid," she rejoined, stiffly, "you must try and say it here."

Others joined them then, and it was impossible for him to ask an explanation of her altered demeanour.

Only a moment before she had smiled in his eyes, and lowered hers in beautiful confusion as she met his ardent gaze; now no statue could have seemed colder or less impressionable to anything he could say or do. The lovely features might have been carved in stone; the whole attitude of her figure betokened a rigid determination, an intense scorn.

Once, for a moment, the white eyelids were raised as he spoke to someone else, and she surveyed him furtively.

Pleasant—very pleasant—was he to look upon—tall, strong, and unquestionably well-bred, with a manner that won for him many friends, a face on which the glances of more than a few women had rested with caressing tenderness.

The bright colours of his racing jacket showing through his open overcoat suited the rich olive of his complexion; the deep feeling that had been roused by his own words lent him an added comeliness, a manlier, more earnest expression; yet Judith concluded her rapid inspection with a sigh.

It was not the first time she had felt out of tune with him, yet on all other occasions she had been ready to believe that the discord might be in her own mind, or, rather, in her imagination; only now she felt so hopelessly jarred, and thought he could never be to her what she had sometimes fancied he might ultimately become.

From his pedestal he had fallen in a moment, and to look upon the sudden wreck was so painful that she was glad when Colonel Lea-Creagh came up and arrested her attention.

Not at once could she reconcile herself to the change, and become accustomed to the thought that her hero was a hero to her no more, but, in spite of his good looks, as ordinary a young man as ever played polo, or sought to please a woman's taste.

Nor could she, in her first revulsion of feeling, believe that it might be only momentary, and a reinstatement of her shattered idol still possible.

So slight a thing can turn one when hovering on the brink; while, when one has once passed over, no consideration, however weighty, could deter one from going on to the end, bitter-sweet as it might prove.

Captain St. Quentin's ill-judged remark was visited upon him too severely, perhaps; but it must be remembered that Judith's feelings were still in a state of transition, when it needed only a trifle to urge her forward, a trifle to re-ignite; and absence of tact meets often with heavier punishment than any vice.

In the meantime, Lea-Creagh, full of his fixed intention, drew close to Judith's side. Others were talking to her, but he had patience and persistence, so that after some ten minutes, during which he stood over her (like a beacon, warning others from the rock on which he had stranded), they found themselves alone.

Judith, never dreaming of the plans he had formed to alter for the better the circumstances of her life, was still looking in the direction towards which St. Quentin had moved away, with a vague sadness in her eyes of which she was not aware.

When the Colonel spoke she started, and brought her thoughts with an effort to the subject which he had chosen.

"I think," he began, valiantly, "a bachelor's life is the most wretched in the world."

"Is not that a very recent discovery?" laughing.

"If it is, that very reason lends it weight. The precepts that are taught us in our copy-books seem sound enough, and only a very bold spirit dare question them; but the truth one finds out for oneself is something more. It comes upon one as a revelation."

She looked questioningly in his face, more curious as to the cause of his earnestness than interested in the matter he was discussing.

"It is so easy for a man to deceive himself," he went on; "his own selfishness helps to persuade him that a life without trouble, without responsibilities, without ties, is preferable; until one day something pierces through the cloud of prejudices in which he has enwrapped himself; he knows the error under which he has been labouring, and—deplores it."

He was speaking well, and knew it; moreover, the faint sign of embarrassment that became apparent in the girl's cheeks as she grew conscious to what all this was tending, encouraged him to proceed with a more passionate intonation.

"Everything seems nothing, any consideration mean, any thought of expediency unworthy, the closest interests small and insignificant, when compared with love!"

Of all the words in the English language, perhaps that word "love" is the most difficult to pronounce with dignity, or even without awkwardness; any unmeaning phrase is gladly substituted—"caring," "being fond of," "liking," all in turn being made to stand in lieu of it, and even these are brought out in shame-faced haste; so that Colonel Lea-Creagh deserved some credit for the decisive force with which he spoke.

Pity it was that the sudden, involuntary glance his speech evoked should have lessened, if not entirely done away with, its effect.

His stout figure and placid, uninteresting face harmonised in no way with the meaning of his words; and Judith, with a little gap of horror, made a movement to join Mrs. Sherston, who was standing near. He stopped her and said, quickly—

"Don't go, Miss Holt. What I have said has not been without intention. For some time now I have known that I could never be happy unless you were my wife. Have I any hope?"

"None, none!" she answered, vehemently, and stopped short, ashamed at the rudeness implied in her unhesitating reply. He had treated her with unvarying kindness, been gentlemanly and respectful always; certainly he had merited more consideration at her hands.

"I am very sorry," she said, with downcast eyes, "and I feel the compliment you have paid me. I do not think I shall ever marry; it is most unlikely, and—"

"There is someone else," he broke in, with an accent of what, in a woman, would have been called pettishness; but she was feeling too sad to rebuke him and her voice faltered just a little as she answered, quietly—

"There is no one—no one at all."

Marely saying so brought the tears into her eyes; even to herself her own case seemed a pitiable one, and she wondered if any of these gaily-dressed women who thronged past her just then to view the beginning of a race from the grand stand were in the same unhappy plight. Keenly she realised her womanhood, and that she was born to love and suffer as her sex had ever done since the days of Eve; and a tender yearning rose in her mind, unconnected with anyone in particular, that gave to her beautiful face something that had formerly lacked—something that had been growing and gathering for weeks and weeks, but was only now gaining form and substance. She understood now all the beauty of a woman's weakness, and she began to doubt if her careless girlhood had been all happiness, whether there might not be trouble and unrest sweeter far than that untroubled calm.

Her intimacy with Lawrence St. Quentin had been an undoubtedly pleasure, nor had she ever been quite blind to its possible consequences, yet it was only now she knew how near she had been to loving him, now, when for the first time it struck her that he might not be worthy of her love.

There was no anger in her heart against him, only an intense self-pity as she became conscious what an aching void there would be were she to banish him from her thoughts. Was anyone quite faultless? she asked herself, in sudden rebellion against her own hard judgment, and would it not be better to let herself drift on as inclination tended?

They were standing near one of the jamps on the course; the race had started—a fact that both had been too absorbed to heed; but

they were aroused by the clatter of horses—four or five steeplechasers, in close proximity to each other, came on at a good pace.

In a moment Judith recognised the light blue jacket and striped amber scarf that St. Quentin was wearing, and she was watching him anxiously as he approached the fence in front of him.

His pony, a little done up from keeping up with others of stronger build, rose rather awkwardly at it, and stumbled slightly as he landed on the other side. The next moment he had recovered himself, and was going at full speed along the piece of straight that constituted the finish; but those few seconds had seemed to the girl more like an hour, as, with strained glance, she awaited the issue.

A sigh of relief broke from her lips as a prolonged cheer proclaimed the race to be over, and she turned away her head.

As to who had won it she felt no curiosity at all; she only cared to know that he was safe, unharmed.

Colonel Lea-Creagh's eyes had been fixed on her all the while in vigilant observance. His question had been answered, but whether truly or no he could scarcely determine; only, surely never woman's face wore such a troubled, anxious look for the sake of anyone to whom she was quite indifferent. That St. Quentin had been tolerably attentive to her, knew, though unaware how far their acquaintance had gone; but now the thought flashed into his mind that if he were in reality his rival, he was a very formidable one.

As Judith turned she caught his inquiring gaze, and blushed a vivid crimson, that the few incoherent words she stammered about "sensitiveness," and "the danger of racing," could not explain away.

Her hearer knew perfectly well that only on the account of one had she been concerned, that all the rest could only be secondary thoughts. He knew, and for the moment his flat, uninteresting face became dignified by an expression of deepest sorrow, and he said, quietly—

"I see; there is no chance for me."

She knew, too, what it was he meant, and a quick disclaimer rose to her lips, yet never passed them. It might be that his surmise was the correct one after all. At least, she could not with any confidence deny it; even to herself she could not answer the question whether the doubt of his worthiness had arisen too late—whether she loved the man or no?

As the crowd round the winning-post dispersed, Judith and her companion were separated, the former going over to Mrs. Sherston's side, and remaining there, white and silent, for the rest of the afternoon;—the Colonel mingling with some other men, outwardly much the same in manner, yet aware that he had lost something he could not even strive to regain. The pomposity of his deportment, the complacency of his expression, did not abate by iota; none could have guessed what a blow had been dealt, nor how bravely it had been borne.

He had dreamed a dream; hoped when he should have despaired; but now that the awakening had come, and he saw that all was over, he did not deceive himself with the idea that future happiness could ever efface the present misery. It had been his first matrimonial venture, and certainly it would be his last; never again would he ask any woman to share his fortunes. Until the day of his death Judith would remain the one love, the one cause of unselfishness his narrow life had ever known.

He was nearly the last to leave the race-course, and as he went along the Mall towards his mess, St. Quentin came out of one of the adjoining compounds.

The Colonel's face darkened angrily as he noticed whose house it was he had just left, and he spoke out bluntly what he thought—

"St. Quentin, do you think your attentions to Miss Holt are compatible with your friend ship for Mrs. Hare?"

Utterly taken aback by the unexpected question, the younger man attempted to prevaricate.

"Your question is a strange one, sir. For over a year I have been friendly with Mrs. Hare. When I fall in love—"

"Can you honestly say you have not done so already? Miss Holt is a girl few men could see without admiring—well, loving is the proper term."

"And suppose I do love her?"

"Then you ought to be brave enough, honest enough, to do something for her sake. Give up Mrs. Hare altogether. I don't say there is any harm in her, but give her up."

"She is my friend," repeated the young man, doggedly.

Lea-Creagh shrugged his shoulders.

"There are friendships and friendships, and naturally every man judges by his own experience. Mine has not been a happy one in these matters. Some women there are, I dare say, who, from good comradeship, can throw off their womanhood, and be to a man what another man might be—only sweeter, gentler, and more sympathetic. Ask yourself whether Mrs. Hare is such an one, whether she would be willing to see you married, whether you yourself would care to see her on friendly terms with your wife?"

St. Quentin gnawed his moustaches in indecision for some moments before he replied, sharply—

"It is scarcely fair to discuss any lady as we are discussing these two."

With an impatient gesture, Lea-Creagh waived the objection.

"This is strictly between ourselves. I am speaking to you as a father might to a son. Of Mrs. Hare I only know the social qualities, and readily admit her attractions. It is on that account I warn you of a possible danger, because I know, to my cost, how difficult it is to be constantly with a beautiful and taking woman and not to succumb to her charms. Propinquity, St. Quentin, is the very deuce! Take my advice, and cut the whole thing at once."

St. Quentin opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again so tightly that the cigar between his lips was jerked to the ground.

"I thought, sir," he said, presently, "that you yourself admired Miss Holt?"

"So I did; so I do. I will not deny it for a moment, though I may as well tell you candidly, knowing that you will respect my confidence, that I have no hope in that quarter—none at all. She has told me so this very afternoon, and it is on that account I am saying all this to you. There are some women who rouse all one's worst qualities, for whose sake one would commit any crime, outrage the holiest laws. Yet, thank Heaven! there are others whose influence has a contrary tendency. I feel as if I could bear the blow I have received to-day from Judith Holt's hands if I could only know her to be happy."

"And—and why have you said all this to me?" awkwardly, yet with dawning self-satisfaction in his face.

"Because I believe she cares for you, and she is worthy of more than a divided devotion in return."

St. Quentin lit a fresh cigar, and puffed away at it vigorously for some seconds before replying, his Colonel watching him anxiously all the while, trying to judge from his manner whether his words had had any good effect.

Just as they entered the mess gates, the younger man stopped and grasped his senior's hand.

"I thank you, sir, for what you have said. Believe me, I appreciate your kindness. That Miss Holt is worthy of a better man than I am certain; but if she will have me I will do my best to make her happy. I don't think we men ever do ourselves justice until we love in earnest, and she is enough to make anyone put forth his best endeavour. I will remember your words. She shall never have reason to be jealous of anyone again."

He spoke warmly, carried away by his feelings; and even then, in spite of the sincere

ring in his tones, Lea-Creagh found himself wondering whether any credence should be given to his protestations, experience having taught him that those who say least as a rule do most.

No further conversation passed between them then, and the Colonel went into the anteroom, and took up a paper as an excuse for prosecuting his thoughts.

He felt that he had argued well throughout; yet, somehow, he was equally assured that in the second case, as in the first, his words had had little or no weight.

A man must "dare his own weird," no outside efforts can restrain him; nor can he be spared the consequences of his own folly.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

It is said that many illnesses are rendered incurable by want of candour on the part of the patient at the outset; the dread of hearing the worst exceeding their hope of ultimate recovery by means of proper remedies.

If this be so, there must be some excuse for those who, conscious of a threatened disturbance in the quietude of their existence, lack the moral courage to sift the matter to the bottom, and only consider how they can shirk the danger for the present, not how to avoid it altogether.

For a few days Mr. Sherston did nothing to test the truth of what Mrs. Trevor had told him, nothing to protect himself if the case were so desperate as he believed.

He wandered about aimlessly, with the letter addressed to Judith in his pocket, throwing furtive glances in her direction whenever they met, as though trying to determine from her manner how much she knew—how far she was to be feared.

But she, not certain that he had been warned, maintained her composure, and, indeed, was so full of her own cause for trouble as to be at times tempted to forget the more important task she had taken upon herself to perform.

There had not been so much to remind her of it lately. Mr. Johnson had not annoyed her, nor had he troubled Winifred too frequently with his presence; and, relieved by the cessation of the actual pain his loverlike attentions caused her, the girl seemed to recover strength and grow more hopeful about the future.

It even entered her head that he might be regretting the bargain that, on her part, had been so unwillingly made, and the thought struck her that an appeal to be released might not be in vain.

Determined to lose no such happy chance from lack of courage, she seized the first opportunity of speaking to him alone. He was walking up and down in front of the house with the "Indian Telegraph" in his hand, when she stepped from under the shadow of the verandah and boldly joined him, all her heart upon her lips.

The air of resignation with which he folded up his paper and waited for her to speak disturbed her somewhat, but she was resolute to put her scheme into execution.

"May I speak to you a moment?" she began. "I am at your disposal always," politely.

A slight flush spread over her thin features. She was looking weak still, but, having been independent of the sofa for nearly a week, had ceased to be considered an invalid.

As he walked on quickly she did her best to keep up with his longer stride, though the exertion was evidently painful, and her voice sounded very unsteady as she went on—

"I have been thinking that when you asked me to marry you, you may have spoken without due consideration—without knowing me as I am—without knowing others. There must be so many far more fitted for the position of your wife—prettier, pleasanter in every way—and you may have repented of your choice!"

"Do you imagine I should tell you if I had?"

"But, indeed, that is just what I wish that you should do. I am not very young; I do not care for gaieties or society of any sort. How

could I blame you if, since you spoke to me first, you had seen all my faults—and were sorry?"

He laughed outright at her eagerness—a harsh, discordant laugh, that contained more mockery than merriment.

"You are not to get rid of me so easily, Miss Winifred! Ours is a marriage of convenience, and neither must expect too much from the other. Now, were it a question of love—"

"Why should you not marry for love? You do not even pretend to care for me!"

"Because I cannot afford luxuries."

"And I am not rich. You know as well as I that my father lives up to his income, and that very little will be left for me!"

"That does not concern me in the least. I have money enough for both."

"Then why—" She started, and stopped as suddenly, persuaded of the utter hopelessness of the case; but it suited him to answer, and he did so with apparent good humour—

"Because you are your father's daughter, and I prefer to have a wife whose connections are well known, whose position is assured in the country where I mean to settle for good. Moreover, notwithstanding money is power, and can buy most things nowadays, I am afraid I must not blind myself to the fact that not to everyone should I be acceptable as a suitor."

This undisguised cynicism, and the swift glance of amusement that sped from his half-closed eyes, sent a violent shudder through her frame. She stood still, feeling she could not walk another step; and he stopped also, curious as to what she would say or do next.

"You mean that I am bought and sold, and that I must look for no mercy at your hands!" she cried, hysterically.

"If you choose to put it baldly, I would rather say that I am too ardent a lover to relinquish a prize I have only with difficulty won. I feel more inclined to cement our bonds than loosen them, even a little. This very day I mean to speak to Mr. Sherston, to implore him to fix an early date for our marriage. You would not wish to pain him, and vex me, by any appearance of unwillingness?"

He leant forward to look into her pale face, but she kept it turned away, so that he might not read the agony of disappointment which was written there. She had built too much upon this appeal, and failure seemed almost too hard to bear.

"May I venture to hope that I carry with me your good wishes for my success?" he persisted, remorselessly, and tried to touch her hand.

"What does it matter? To-morrow or next year, it is all the same!" was the bitter retort, and, laughing a little recklessly, she broke away.

With a self-satisfied smile, he walked on slowly to the other side of the house, where was Mr. Sherston's private room. Winifred's prayers had had so little effect that they had not even roused his anger. Every cruel word had been spoken in cold blood, and with the deliberate intention of preventing a repetition of such scenes. He wished her to know on what terms they were to stand, and to distinctly realise that she must never attempt to work upon his feelings nor to question his decrees. All emotion must be crushed out of her, and her spirit absolutely broken, before she could be of use to him that he intended.

An expression in which was unusual warmth, even some tenderness, flitted across his face as he thought of how Judith would have answered these conditions; and an overwhelming, impulsive feeling came over him, that, for her sake, he would have been content to give up all his schemes of self-advancement, happy in being mastered by love rather than rule through fear.

He worshipped her so passionately that, had he possessed a hope, he could have sacrificed all to call her his; and yet so deeply-rooted were the self-seeking instincts of ambition, so hard and unscrupulous was his nature, that before he had turned the handle of the door,

and passed into the Commissioner's room, he had persuaded himself that, after all, he was best satisfied with things as they were.

His manner was suave in the extreme as he asked if he were intruding, and offered, if this were so, to come some other time.

Mr. Sherston put away some letters he was writing, and, without rising, pushed a chair towards him.

"I have nothing in the world to do! Say what you have to say now," he said, quietly.

Something of superiority and patience in his tone irritated Mr. Johnson, and he retorted, bluntly—

"It is on your business I have come. It is nothing to me if all the world knows my real name, and the reason of my being in hiding here!"

"Pshaw! You are too hasty, my good fellow. You and I cannot afford to quarrel, our interests being the same."

"But are they the same? I am not sure. I often think it would suit my purpose better to make a clean breast of that Chapore bribery business, and start afresh with a good name."

But the Commissioner, whether disturbed or no by the implied threat, was not the man to be brow-beaten with impunity. He toyed with his glasses a second or two before he remarked, thoughtfully—

"Do you think you would gain by that? It is my honest opinion that the position of Mr. Johnson, globe-trotter, reputed millionaire, and guest of the Commissioner of Jhalapore, is a more enviable one than could be that of Michael Straughan, deserter from the 9th Lancers, and whilst my head clerk, even if it were proved that he only took a secondary part in that affair, consenting to bear all the onus—for a consideration."

"You take matters with a very high hand," angrily.

"I never knew any good done by playing too low. You know I am willing to do anything in reason to mark my gratitude for a

service you did me over twenty years ago, but it would do neither of us any good, and probably disgust us both, were I to affect a subservience I do not feel."

There was a certain dignity in his manner as he spoke that impressed and subdued the other in spite of himself. At that moment he felt he was only Michael Straughan, the shock-headed Scotch clerk, who had been honoured by a word of commendation from his chief, and thought it no shame to stand bareheaded, cap in hand, while he passed through the room.

"You talk of gratitude!" he observed, disparagingly. "But what have you done for me, after all, in return for what I risked for you?"

"A great deal! Too much, I sometimes think. I have introduced you to my friends, taken you into my house, and have suffered you to become engaged to my daughter!"

"An engagement is one thing, marriage is another! When is the wedding-day to be, Sherston?"

"I almost doubt it coming off at all!" was the quiet rejoinder.

"What do you mean?" blankly.

"I mean, Straughan, that I think your game is exploded. You have been recognised, and they are seeking proofs to convict you. It is a mere question of time now. I should say."

"My ruin means yours, too!" he declared, malignantly.

"I know that. I neither ask nor expect any generosity at your hands!"

"I'm glad of that; for there is a satisfaction in bringing down someone with you when you fall. That, I am sure, I could not resist. Who do you say is working against me? But I need not ask. It is that beautiful, fiend who masquerades as your daughter's companion."

"You have guessed rightly! Look at this,"

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lending him a letter. "She has unearthed my brother Gerald in the Kanowar bazaar; and you will see by this she is sure of his aid in the matter."

Even Mr. Johnson's assurance failed him as he read. He was perceptibly paler when he asked, with assumed nonchalance—

"And Mrs. Trevor! How did she respond to the appeal that I presume was made?"

"She utterly refused to swear to your identity at all, though she informed me privately that she had recognised you from the first."

"That is strange! I never came across her that I remember; never spoke to her, of course."

"She saw you in church, probably, or playing cricket, I dare say. Women have tenacious memories when it suits them."

"And she is sparing me for the sake of you? She must have been very keen about you once, so still, perhaps; and is a pretty woman, I suppose, and an attractive one!"

"Will you confine yourself to the matter in hand?" sternly.

"Ah! Well, you must forgive my digression. Only a woman—a pretty woman, be it understood—could have led me away from a subject that so nearly concerns myself. And, apropos of pretty women, now I wonder what on earth induced Miss Holt to take all the trouble to bring up that old, half-forgotten misdemeanour against me?"

Mr. Sherston hesitated.

He had never betrayed the fact that Judith suspected him to be her father's partner, disengaged, and fleeing from justice.

Closely as their interests were allied, it may have been that he could not bring himself to protect the man who, like a very Mephistopheles of cunning, had taken advantage of the one weak and wicked act of his life to prey upon him ever since.

"You know best what reason she may have to dislike you," he said, satirically. "It may be a merely personal distaste; women have very delicate perceptions, and you have never been a favourite with them; or she may have more serious reasons for her animosity. You may have known her father or her brother—robbed him, perhaps, as you robbed me. Remember, I know nothing of how you spent the interval between the time you left India, as Michael Strangman, and turned up again as Mr. Johnson, with your fortune made—how, I never inquired."

Mr. Johnson scowled darkly, and looked down his nose furtively, to see if the allusion to his possible knowledge of Judith's people in England was mere guile or deliberately intended. He learnt nothing from the Commissioner's impassive face, and said, slowly, after a pause:

"It is scarcely worth while speculating as to the cause of a woman's hatred. It would answer our purpose better to consider how we can disarm or conciliate her."

"Mrs. Trevor's idea is, that she is only working to prevent your marriage with Winifred."

Then as the other did not at once reply, Mr. Sherston added, quickly, more of restrained feeling in his voice than there had been before:

"Why not give up the idea, Johnson? Anything else that is mine you need only ask for to have. It is not even as though you loved her, and on that account were prepared to risk some danger for her sake. If anyone has ever touched your heart it is Judith Holt."

A slight twitching of the man's thin lips showed that this shot had gone straight home; but Johnson was not the one to allow himself to be influenced for any time by a mere sentiment, a fancy.

"Love," he declared, sneeringly, "is an amusement for boys. Self-advancement is the serious business of life."

"With your money you might marry someone more calculated to help you on in society than Winifred."

"Might I? I doubt it. I am not one to give up substance for a shadow. My money is no use to me unless I have connections that are well known, and of undisputed respectability. You are a noted man out here, and have the immediate prospect of rising higher. It will suit me excellently well to talk of my wife's mother, Lady Sherston!"

The Commissioner remained silent, disgusted at his future son-in-law's innate vulgarity. The servant came in with letters, and, during the short time that ensued, two or three were opened, read, and laid aside. Another was in his hand when Johnson broke in, impatiently:

"All this is nonsense and beside the question. I came in here to ask when the wedding was to be. If it is a fact that Miss Holt and your brother have joined together in an attempt to ruin me, the sooner it is the better, for they will certainly not extend their enmity to Winifred, and for her sake, if not on my own merits, I shall escape scot-free."

"It is Winifred's privilege to fix the day," said Mr. Sherston, in a hard, pained voice, feeling that he was entangled in a web from the meshes of which there was no escape.

"She will do what you tell her to, of course. It must be very soon—at once. Why not to-morrow or the next day?"

"Impossible! It would only arouse comment, and my wife would never agree to it."

"Then in a week at latest. I warn you I will submit to no further delays nor subterfuges."

Mr. Sherston pondered the matter for a few moments; and then, in a tone that there was no gainsaying, he said, decidedly:

"To-day is the first. The wedding shall be on the tenth. I promise you that, but not a day earlier. I have something at stake as well as you—considerations that cannot be ignored."

He rose from his chair, as a hint that the conversation was closed; and, with some muttered objections, Johnson accepted his dismissal, agreeing to the offered terms.

Only nine days remained, and in that time, surely, little could be done to shake his position or circumvent his plans.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

Only nine days! When Winifred heard this, the transient gleam of spirit which had given her courage to throw herself upon Johnson's mercy died out of her at once; something else died too, without which life is scarcely worth the living—hope!

She moved about the house like a ghost, being scarcely conscious of her actions, and utterly careless of all that was going on; bringing Mrs. Sherston to the verge of desperation by the indifference with which she met all details regarding necessary arrangements, and especially the important subject of the trousseau.

Judith boldly preached rebellion, but Winifred felt too heartbroken to resist; after that first signal failure being loth to make another effort. Besides which, she felt that, having of her own free will promised to save her father from a danger of whose import she was unaware, she was bound to go on with her self-imposed task. So the days fled, every one bringing her nearer the inevitable end.

During the intervening week, it entered into Mrs. Hare's head to give a moonlight picnic. The Sherstons were invited, and a separate invitation came for Judith, who, however, while sending a formal acceptance, having no excuse to offer as a refusal, inwardly resolved on no account to go; but at the last moment Winifred got one of her violent attacks of fever, and, Mrs. Sherston absolutely declining to go alone, she was compelled to accompany her.

It was a lovely night, such a night as, perhaps, is nowhere known except in India,

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where the climate also permits of its perfect enjoyment; and as they drove to the appointed spot, Judith began to feel a pleasurable anticipation overcome her first reluctance.

St. Quentin would be there, she knew, and lately she had been thinking much of how they would meet, and on what terms, whether her instinctive distrust of him would be strengthened, or whether the attraction he had always possessed for her would surmount every other feeling.

A dozen times she had asked herself if she loved him, and each time the question had been dismissed without a satisfactory reply. Now, for the first time, she wondered if he cared for her, and the simple query sent the blood rushing to her heart, causing it to beat almost to suffocation—both of which symptoms might have seemed to some answer sufficient.

Judith, however, was unlike most other girls, and, not having squandered her emotions on several different objects, was slower to come to a conclusion; to think of any man as a lover and beloved was a new and wonderful sensation.

When they reached the meeting-place they found all the other guests assembled, only waiting for their arrival to sit down to dinner; and Judith found herself placed between Mr. Johnson and St. Quentin.

From very shyness she addressed herself to the former, and he, from pure maliciousness, devoted himself to her in return, paying her such exaggerated attentions that she could scarcely contain her anger. Once, in desperation, she turned to the man who was her lover, but met a glance so full of passionate reproach that, perforce, she turned away again, and submitted to what before had seemed intolerable with new patience. All that Johnson was saying she could ignore; indeed, she scarcely deigned to listen, and only answered when common courtesy compelled a reply; but the question that burned in St. Quentin's eyes could not so easily be set aside.

She felt that a crisis had arrived in her life, and the next few hours would decide whether she would give all her heart without reservation into this man's keeping, or return to her former state of comfortable indifference to the whole sex. The matter was too momentous to be settled in haste or without due consideration, and, this being so, she forced herself to look towards Mr. Johnson, and even speak to him now and then, rather than turn in the direction of him who was impatiently waiting to claim her attention.

When the meal was over, and the signal given to rise, she still kept her face averted, waiting nervously for some decisive action on his part.

"Shall we wander off?" asked Mr. Johnson, pleasantly. "Mrs. Hare has given out she does not mean to entertain us; we are to amuse ourselves."

"I don't think that would be exactly my idea of amusement," with a languid impertinence that delighted Mr. Manslever, who was standing by. He had always had a sort of admiration for herself; moreover, Johnson was by no means popular with the young men of the station.

"I wish you would come with me, Miss Holt," he pleaded; "even if we did not amuse each other, we could see how the others managed it, and that would be something."

She gave a quick glance round. St. Quentin was no longer in her vicinity, and, with a faint smile, she assented to the boy's proposition, moving away with lingering steps, as though half-hoping, or at least expecting, that someone would follow.

But no one did. St. Quentin at that moment was occupied in lighting a cigarette, and did not look that way, being, indeed, half-inclined to give up all hope of speaking to her that night.

It is strange how trifles light as air, and insignificant in themselves, may influence all our lives for good or ill.

A mere coming in, a going out, a glance, a word at the right moment or the wrong, an act simple in itself, yet destined to be repented through many weary watches of the night—any one of these things, utterly meaningless, perhaps, and without definite intention, may mar the fairest prospects, ruin the brightest hopes, or, on the other hand, lead to a happiness of which hitherto we scarcely dared to dream.

St. Quentin never knew whether it were pique or wounded pride, or simply the promptings of an adverse fate, that caused him to glance at Mrs. Hare, and, meeting her gaze, at once provoking and inviting, stroll over to her side. A moment later he found himself walking with her under the trees, the moon streaming down on her upturned face, and the diamond rings upon her fingers, as with one hand she secured a lace kerchief under her chin.

"There are more dangerous things than sunstroke, they tell me. Have you never heard of moon-blindness, or moon-madness—which is it?" she asked, in her lowest, most thrilling tones, bringing her eyes to bear with deadliest effect upon his face.

"I can believe in both, here, with you," he whispered back; and the conversation having once taken this turn, it required someone with a stronger head or harder heart than St. Quentin possessed to lead it back into safer channels. The moon was so soft and bright, and its rays so exquisitely becoming to the woman who moved gracefully at his side, that it was no wonder he lost his head for the nonce, and all idea of the flight of time, until, nearly an hour later, a sudden turn of the path they were treading brought them face to face with Judith and her companion.

He, with all the sentiment which formed so large a proportion of his character, aroused by the circumstances and the temptation to which they had exposed him, was leaning down to listen to words purposely spoken beneath her breath, while she, consummate flirt and intriguer as she was, pretended the greatest confusion when she recognized her rival.

Judith made no sign that she was hurt or surprised. Her clear blue eyes had taken in the situation at a glance, every detail of the scene, even to the fact that round her shoulders Mrs. Hare was wearing a scarf fac-simile of the one that St. Quentin had given to her, and which she, too, was wearing then for the first time. Mrs. Hare's keen sight had also detected this at once.

"Is it not a lovely night, and am I not good to give you all a chance of enjoying it? And what a pretty scarf, Miss Holt—just like mine! I wonder if it was given by the same person?"

"It is not a gift. It was only lent, and shall be returned," with a defiant glance towards her recreant lover.

Mrs. Hare smiled, and shrugged her shoulders with a pretty, deprecating gesture.

"I can see I have touched on a sore subject. Let us go on before I make more mistakes," she said, playfully, and, obediently, St. Quentin went where she led.

Judith turned to her companion, a pathos in her eyes of which she was not conscious.

"Would you mind fetching my coat? It is chillier than I thought," she said; and, wondering what it was that had moved her so, the boy went on her errand, leaving her leisure to think and recover her composure.

Though she had never allowed herself to love him, there had been a tenderness in her relations with St. Quentin she could not deny nor explain away. No man had ever been so near touching her heart, none had been so continually in her thoughts.

He had awakened in her impulses she had never guessed could ever come into her mind—feelings that she had thought would be impossible to her, though common to all other women.

He had taught her that she too was capable of love, proved to her the weakness she had been too prone to deny. But, even now, as

all the new and tender shoots were springing up, an icy wind had shrivelled them in one keen, cruel blast, and she doubted if they could ever come to blossom.

Never had she met any man so gentle and winning in manner, so manly-looking, yet graceful in his movements as a woman; never was there such a pleasant voice, so sweet and so persuasive; such a handsome face, such speaking eyes; and yet never, never, surely, in all the wide, wide world, was there ever so weak a nature, so false a tongue!

With fingers tightly clasped and strained, gazing into the darkness beyond, she stood and waited, thinking bitter thoughts, though to someone who drew nearer, unnoticed in the heavy shadows that fell upon the path along which he came, her face seemed marvelously calm. Perhaps she was not so angry as he had feared.

"Judith!" he whispered, eagerly, and with a start she turned.

"Is it you, Captain St. Quentin?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes; it is I. It is not so wonderful that I should come where my thoughts have been all night! Why were you so cold just now at dinner? You would not speak, nor even look my way!"

Using a strategy that often proves successful, he had attempted to carry the war into the enemy's country, but Judith took no notice of his rage, and let the accusation go by unheeded, only a scornful smile on her curving lips showing she had heard it.

"You are vexed with me! Angry because I was walking with Mrs. Hare! If you only knew how I longed to be with you!"

"You concealed the longing very well!" she remarked, and laughed.

"Surely you are not jealous of that woman?"

"Jealous!"

"Then you think I have broken my promise?"

"I asked you for no promise! That you have chosen to ignore a self-imposed vow concerns you only, and not me!"

"Yet, if you cared—"

"I do not care! What you do is, and must always be, indifferent to me!"

He looked at her—a look that, an hour before, would have made her tremble and color like a rose, but now left her utterly irresponsible. The sight of his faithlessness as she had seen it, beyond question or possibility of self-defence, had cured her in a moment of what from the first she had felt to be a weakness; all the faint doubts she had been conscious of before culminating in a bitter disbelief that nothing he could plead would shake.

Yet so near had she been to loving him that the putting him out of her heart caused her an acute pang, and for a long, long time she would feel an aching void.

Though her idol had proved to have had feet of clay, he had, nevertheless, been her idol for a while, and not just yet dared she gaze on the pedestal on which she had set him empty now, yet occupied for many a day to come with memories of the past, and thoughts of what might have been. She looked beyond him, not at him, being, at the same time, too proud to sink her eyes.

St. Quentin guessed something of what was in her mind, knew that she despised him utterly for his vacillation, yet, man-like, the very opposition he foresaw increased his interest in the pursuit, his voice being pregnant with deepest passion, as he went on, earnestly—

"Do not judge me unheard. Can any woman judge a man fairly, not understanding his temptations, and expecting him to be pure and single-minded as she herself? Whatever my faults, I love you—love you with all my soul—no other shall ever be my wife! Will you reject me?"

With a movement of her body, a turn of her head, she answered him, in words coming readily to her lips. Her heart had softened towards him as she spoke, but she could never love him now, however speciously he argued,

more however warm his prayers. All that was over for ever. If he would only realise that it was so, and spare her further pain.

"I thought you loved me!" he burst out, reproachfully.

"It is so easy to be deceived—it is so easy to deceive oneself," she answered, gently.

"Do you mean to say you never cared—ever!"

She shook her head.

"I might have done had everything happened differently," she admitted the next moment.

"And do you mean that, for the sake of that woman—a woman without either heart or conscience, who is well known as an unscrupulous flirt—"

"You said she was your friend," she reminded him, in cold distaste.

He had the grace to look ashamed as he answered, quickly—

"I cannot pick and choose my words when so much is at stake. Only forgive me the past, and in the future you shall have no cause for anger or contempt."

"I forgive you, of course."

"But I want more than forgiveness. Oh, Judith, I want your love! Be merciful! give me some hope!"

His handsome face was bent to the level of his own, his moustaches almost touching her hair, while one arm stole softly round her waist.

"I love you! I love you!" he repeated, passionately, in her ear.

Quietly she released herself, and faced him from a distance. A mist rose before her eyes, and indistinctly, she saw her cousin Avon standing in the place of the man she had judged, and found to be wanting. The longer she gazed, the more misleading was the vision, until it became so life-like she felt impelled to stretch out her hands to him, to speak his name, though with no definite intention, no thought of rescinding her decision of six months ago.

It was only because he was so true, while this other was so false, so strong; while he who stood before her now was unstable as water, and incapable of pure and earnest passion. It was the idea that Avon's great love for her had enabled him to bridge the distance between them, and appear before her, waking, as latterly he had often done in dreams, that gave her new strength to conclude a trying scene, and lent a steadfastness to her reply that there was no gainsaying.

"All this only distresses us both, and can do no good. I can never care for you. I will never be your wife!"

As her clear, decided tones fell on the quiet evening air, footsteps approached them quickly, and the next moment young Manlever was holding a coat for her to put on.

"Such a hunt as I had for it! All the coachmen were asleep, or bubble-bubbling. They don't deserve to be out on a night like this," he observed, cheerily.

"I don't suppose it has ever entered their heads that it could be an occasion for enjoyment," was the light response.

St. Quentin stood apart, watching her, drinking in every detail of her beauty, driven almost to madness by the thought that but for his own folly she might have been his, and was now farther removed from his reach than any other.

She looked very lovely in the moonlight as it streamed down through a break in the trees and bathed her in its pale glory, yet never had she seemed so unapproachable.

Her beautiful blue eyes gleamed cold like steel; her lips were compressed in proudest scorn, the very carriage of her head expressed disdain unspeakable as she turned to move away with young Manlever.

Now, when she was lost to him, she seemed more beautiful than ever in his eyes, and with a last desperate effort to recover lost ground, St. Quentin sprang to her side.

"I did not explain. Perhaps you did not understand. Let me see you again to-morrow,

and I will tell you all."

From a distance floated the words of a song, with which Mrs. Hare was—in spite of her protestations—entertaining her guests. The words had an accent of sadness that impressed them both, and neither, in after years, forgot the air, nor the circumstances under which they heard it once.

You do not love me, no;  
Bid me good-bye and go;  
Good-bye, good-bye, 'tis better so;  
Bid me good-bye and go.

It was the end of a verse, and Judith had only hesitated a moment before she answered, quietly, no trace of pain, nor even regret, in her tones—

"There is nothing you can have to say, nothing that I wish to hear," then passed away from his presence and out of his life for ever.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2076. Back numbers can be obtained through all Newsagents.)

## Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writer, not for publication but as a guarantee of good faith.

**MISFORTUNE.**—The only institution of the kind for reduced gentlemen that I know of is the Charterhouse. Address the Registrar, Charterhouse Square, Aldersgate Street, E.C.

**Roderick.**—The Thirty Years' War in Germany, which began in 1618 and ended in 1648, left the country cut up into a number of petty states, whose rulers were monarchs in fact, if not in name.

**BASILIE MABEL.**—While white is not considered to be a mourning colour, it is often worn as such. Girls and young ladies frequently wear white dresses with black ribbons, sashes, hats and gloves.

**LORD TRACY.**—I am afraid you cannot get the special information you desire about Durban, but try Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W. The answer is there if anywhere, and will be given at once.

**DIANA.**—The planet nearest to the sun is Mercury, and after it come in order Venus, the Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Mercury, Venus, and Mars are smaller than the Earth; all the others are much larger.

**F. L.**—The girl is quite free to go where she may think fit. The parties have no legal claim upon her, but if she has been indebted to them for her maintenance, of course they have a claim upon her regard which she cannot well neglect.

**ALMA.**—The Galaxy or Milky Way is, according to Herschel, "that great luminous band which stretches every evening all across the sky, from horizon to horizon, and which forms a zone completely encircling the whole sphere, almost in a great circle."

**DONALD.**—There is precisely the same amount of similarity in Daniel and Donald that there is between Moses and Malcolm—that is to say, there is no similarity or connection whatever. The one is a purely Hebrew name, the other a distinctly Gaelic one.

**SWEET JENNY.**—(1) Jenny is a synonym for Janet, and that again means little Jane; so both names have the same origin, but they are distinct names for all that. Jane can never be called Jenny, or Jenny, Jane. (2) Maria has, no doubt, grown out of Mary, but it has no acknowledged connection with it.

THE MOST NUTRITIOUS.

**EPPS'S**

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**COCOA**

BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR EYES

It is impossible to take too much care of one's eyes, and those who value their eyesight will do well to send to STEPHEN GREEN, 210, Lambeth Road, London, for a little book "How to Preserve the Eyesight," which tells the story of a cure for all troubles of the eyes, eyelashes, and eyelids. **SINGLETON'S EYE OINTMENT** has proved its virtues during 300 years, and it may be obtained of all chemists and stores in ancient pedestal pots for 2/- each.

FWS

## ASTROLOGY.

A RELIABLE FORECAST of your Future in Love, Marriage, Business, etc. What I tell you comes true; send me, birthdate, and stamped self-addressed envelope to Q. EDWARDS, 3, Cursitor St., London, E.C.

**IGNORAMUS.**—Cosmogony is the science which treats of the origin of the universe. Cosmography is the science—which treats of the construction, figure, and arrangement of all parts of the world; and, therefore, comprehends astronomy, geography, and geology.

**POPPY.**—Perfumes were in general use among the ancients. Aromatic drugs, such as storax, frankincense, benzoin, cloves, etc., enter into the composition of a perfume; and many perfumes are composed of aromatic herbs or leaves, as lavender, marjorams, sage, thyme, etc.

**ELAINE.**—A lover should be treated with the same gentleness as a new glove. The young lady should pull him on with the utmost tenderness at first, only making the smallest advance at a time, till she gradually gains upon him, and twists him ultimately round her little finger; whereas the young lady who is hasty, and in too great a hurry, will never get a lover to take her hand, but be left with nothing but her finger-ends.

**INQUISITIVE DICK.**—When the tobacco plant is ripe the leaves are gathered and hung up to dry in such a way that they cannot touch each other. When dry they are packed in huge rolls in barrels or cases. That is the stage in which the weed is received in this country. Here the leaves are sprinkled with an infusion of tobacco made from stalks and waste parts and left to heat and ferment. While still damp the leaves are either laid upon each other and pressed into cavendish or negrohead, or spun into twist.

**RUPERT.**—A letter of condolence may be sent as soon as news of the death of the friend is received. If an interval of some weeks or months has elapsed before such tidings arrive, state the fact in your letter, and express regrets that you have not sooner learned of it. Such letters should be governed by circumstances to some extent. No arbitrary laws can well be made on such subjects. The laws of goodwill, sympathy and kindness govern in affairs of this sort, oftentimes to the exclusion of forms or ceremonies.

**CHICKEN.**—A deputy-lieutenant acts under the direction of the lord-lieutenant, who is the head of the local military forces of the county—the militia and yeomanry.

**JOINT.**—The fact of the leading partner being a lady does not in any way render the use of "Messrs." inappropriate in addressing the firm. That is customary under all circumstances.

**HORSE.**—The French were in exclusive possession of machine guns in their war with the Germans; but their mitrailleuse proved much less formidable in action than had been anticipated.

**ILM.**—The use of ambergris in Europe is now entirely confined to perfumery. It was once regarded as useful in typhoid fevers and various nervous diseases. The word is pronounced as if spelled am-ber-greez, the accent on the first syllable.

**GORGONZOLA.**—It is well known that some kinds of cheese are more digestible than others; but hitherto there have been no reliable data on the subject. A German investigator tells us that Cheshire and Roquefort are the most easily digested. The others follow in order of merit—namely, Emmenthal, Gorgonzola, Neuchatel, Ramadour, Rotenburg, Mainz, Fromage de Brie, and lastly, the most indigestible of all, Swiss cheese.

**SALLY.**—I have never heard of that "talisman against enemies" which you describe as being "composed of pure grain tin, manufactured during the increase of the moon and the character engraved upon it," but it is, of course, a catch-penny humbug. There are sharp-witted, unscrupulous persons who make a living by preying on the ignorance and superstitions of others. How can a piece of tin protect you from your enemies, even though it was made in the increase of the moon, and had the "character" (whose or whatever character?) engraved upon it?

**CELIA** says: "I am a blonde, with red hair and blue eyes. I am aware that in my type, more than any other, looks depend on dressing, particularly on the colours worn. I have always heard that blue should be worn by blondes, but it makes me look hideous. I cannot wear pink or bright red; I am not sure about green. Please tell me what colours are adapted to my style." Blue and green do not harmonise with red hair, or even hair that is reddish. Black, with a dull finish, is most becoming to a "chestnut blonde," as your type is called by the French. Black cheviot in winter, and black muslin-veiling, or crêpe de chine, or ponge silk in summer, or, for the house. Pale lilac can be worn, deep reddish prune, dark brown, dark mahogany red, and a delicate shade of amber velvet, in any of the deep, rich shades, is wonderfully becoming to your type.

**AFFECTED NOSE.**—Bathing the nose with water in which there has been put a few drops of camphor is said to whiten it. But as redness of the nose usually results from some stomach trouble, it would be wise to search for the cause and get rid of it before you apply external remedies.

**BRADLEY.**—Farmer is one of the very large class of names from occupations, as baker, tailor, gardener, carpenter, smith, etc. These are not peculiar to any division of the United Kingdom, but some are more common in one division than another. Farmer is, perhaps, English; it is not in use in Scotland.

**DORA.**—You should either treat the gentleman with such winning cordiality as to encourage him to declare his sentiments for you, or else give him up altogether, and accept attentions from other gentlemen. If you keep on in the same course which you have pursued for the past six years, you will become an old woman before you are aware of it, and find that it is too late for you to win the love of any gentleman.

**GRAY-BIRD.**—There is no love powder which has any efficacy in it. It is impossible to control a person's affections by giving him any powder or potion. You did right when you refused to let your beau kiss you. Until he becomes your betrothed lover he has no right to ask for such a privilege. He will respect you all the more for it in the end, and if he ever really loved you he will not permit your very proper and maidenly behaviour to estrange him from you permanently.

**AURO.**—The superstition concerning "divining rods" requires that the rod should be held in the hands of some one who has the "gift," as it is called, whereby is meant a person so endowed with the "divining" power as to be in wierd sympathy or communication with the invisible object sought to be discovered through the agency of the rod. It is supposed by the believers in the potency of such necromancy that the rod, held by a person having the "gift," will turn in his hands, or that one end of it will sink towards the earth, on his passing over any mine, spring of water, or other object sought for. The rod is usually a green twig, from three to four feet long. Some "professors" of the divining rod set great stress on the way in which it should be cut, the manner of holding it, etc., etc. Of course, all claims to elements of witchcraft or necromancy in this business are unfounded. If the "divining rod" ever does perform any of the functions claimed for it (and testified to in some cases by witnesses who seem to be entitled to credence), it is owing to some simple natural law not yet brought from the foggy domain of ignorance and superstition into the clear realms of philosophy and science.

**PUR.**—I am not able to name any process apart from tanning—and that you object to—which your canvas would be waterproofed without having its weight increased.

**R. B.**—If you can pay and won't pay you may, after a county court order, be sent to prison. If you have goods they may be detained. If you have neither goods nor money you may be ordered to pay by instalments out of future earnings.

**MADCAP.**—The "chief" cause of children being deaf and dumb in their being born without the sense of hearing. They have what is called a "congenital defect." Some, however, are born with perfect auricular organs, which are subsequently ruined by disease.

**QUERY OF DIAMONDS.**—The Orloff (Russia) diamond, which weighs 1942 carats, is the largest cut diamond in the world. Another very large stone, said to be a real diamond, is owned by the Rajah of Mattan, in Borneo, where it was found in 1760. It weighs 36 carats, and is probably the largest uncut diamond known.

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\* \* \* ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 50-52, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.

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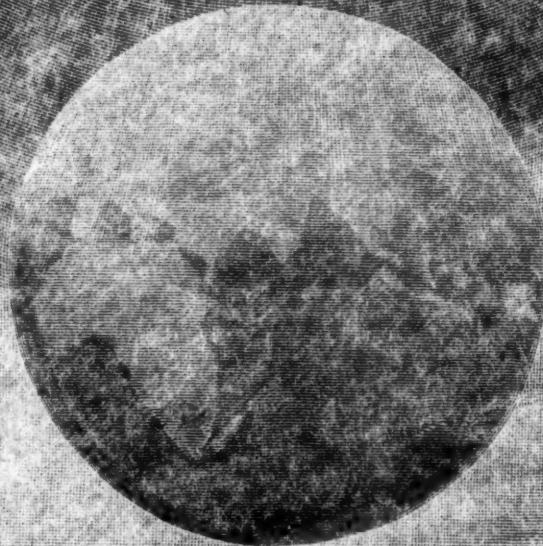
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"THE SUN NEVER SETS"

THE WHOLE WORLD OVER  
UPON THE MILLIONS CONSUMING

# BIRD'S CUSTARD POWDER



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NO EGGS! NO RISK! NO TROUBLE!

JU 190

By the Proprietors at 50-52, Ludgate Hill, and Printed by CHARLES ELLIOTT, PRINTING WORKS, LTD., NEWSPAPER BUILDINGS, PORTUGAL ST., STRAND, W.C.

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"I hope not, Harriet, I hope not," Mr. Prodgers replies, meekly, as he tries to swallow the hot coffee.

"What on earth do they want with you? Harry, why didn't you tell your father last night?"

"I didn't see him last night, did I? dad? I met Geof Lawson (you know his governor is the head of a big firm of lawyers in Lincoln's Inn), so he said he heard his governor give directions to his chief clerk to send an advertisement to two or three morning papers asking for information of Mr. Peter Prodgers, or his next-of-kin. So Geof spoke up and told him that he knew Mr. Prodgers. They wrote down the address and sent that letter," Harry explains, with an air of importance.

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"It's funny they should want to find pa so particularly," Sallie remarks, as she sips her coffee.

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"It's nothing, I daresay," ventures Mr. Prodgers.

"Lawyers don't send for people for nothing!" snaps Mrs. Prodgers.

"Perhaps somebody has left pa a lot of money," Carrie suggests, with a sly look at her father.

"No such luck," Mrs. Prodgers retorts. "There's nothing but work and worry. There's no money left him," she whines.

"Pity Mr. Layson heard him mention pa's name and gave them his address," Pollie says, as she lays down her novel and takes the cup of coffee her mother holds towards her.

"You won't say so if pa has money left him," Carrie says, snappishly.

"Shut up, girls! I won't get out of this to-day. Do 'elp me on with my overcoat!" Mr. Prodgers exclaims, as he rises from the table, and matches his cumbersome outward garment from its peg, while Mrs. Prodgers goes forward, and takes the coat from his hands. Mid-it while he worked his short, stiff arms into the sleeves, the top of his bald head being just on a level with her chin. Seizing his hat and black bag, he hurries from the room.

"You'll get back early, Peter?" his spouse calls after him, as he slams the door with a "Good-morning all."

"I must go to the work-room. The hands don't care a straw for Stubbs; and I hope you girls'll just come in and help a bit to-day."

"You can't expect me to help, ma. I've got my grey dress to alter. Mr. Skipsey is coming to see me to take me to the Adelphi," Pollie answers over the top of her novel.

"Oh! is he? Last week it was the Shaftesbury; this week it is the Adelphi. I ain't got no patience with you, Pollie!"

"There, Pollie, you are always upsetting us," Carrie says, saucily.

The day passes slowly, wearily. Mrs. Prodgers worries her forewoman, and that important individual worries the ill-paid slaves in the work-room.

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Mr. Prodgers provided accommodation for working, but the women who worked at Gorman and Hale's fancy goods could not afford a thing to cook out of their earnings, though the said fancy goods were intended to adorn the fair ladies of the West-end drawing rooms, the lawns, and the Opera.

Another half-hour's rest at five o'clock, when a cup of weak tea is doled out to each worker, the latter bringing their own bread and butter.

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But on this particular evening the young ladies and their mamma are quieter than usual. They sip their weak tea in silence; conversation is at a deadlock. One idea fills the mind of each. It is near the hour of the father's arrival at home.

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Mrs. Stubbs looked from one, to the other with her unusually large eyes. She was very anxious, but she kept quiet. She would soon know all. —

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"No; it's too early. I had to come on business to Victoria Street, so I don't intend to go back." He shut the door and ascended the stairs two at a time.

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"Oh! Sallie and Carrie, do go and help Stubbs clear away; it's nearly six o'clock. I feel awful uneasy. I must change my things before your pa comes."

The sisters obeyed in silence, then Mrs. Prodgers left the room, and went slowly up to her bedroom, leaving Pollie alone with her novel.

At half-past seven Mrs. Prodgers reappeared in the back parlour, looking much improved in a brown brocade gown, a black silk lawn-tennis apron, and a very showy watch-chain. The only occupant of the back parlour was the small servant-of-all-work, who was laying the cloth, plates, and glasses for their usual supper of bread and cheese and beer. So she turned out again and went to the work-room to inspect the result of the day's labour, and to impress the "hands" with her own importance, and her handsome gown and jewellery.

"Dear me! what a miserable lot for a day's work! I have a good mind to sack some of the hands! I may as well have the place empty as to keep it open for their accommodation, and have nothing out of it!"

"Certainly, 'm," assented Stubbs.

"Ah! there's Mr. Prodgers," that gentleman's better half exclaims, as she drops the pretty fancy articles she was examining and hurries from the room.

Mr. Peter Prodgers was in the act of giving his overcoat to Carrie, who had been on the watch for her father. Mrs. Prodgers advanced to the front parlour door, opened it, and went in, making a motion to her husband to follow her. He obeyed.

"May I come in, ma?" calls Carrie.

"No, you mayn't!" snaps her mother, as she closes the door; then she turns and looks at Mr. Prodgers. His face shines with perspiration, but tells nothing.

"Well?"

"Yes, Harriet."

"What is it?"

"Not much."

"I thought not. What is it, anyway?"

"I'll tell you. You remember my brother Joe?" Mr. Prodgers asks, as he mops his hot face with a not very spotless handkerchief.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Your brother Joe!" Mrs. Prodgers exclaims, firing up.

"Yes, it's my brother Joe, Harriet."

"You don't mean to say he's come back to be a burden to us?"

"No, he can't! He's dead!" Peter answers, in a voice of emotion.

"Oh, thank goodness! I am glad! Well, what does he want if he's dead?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Then what does what's-his-name—the lawyer—want?" the lady asks, boldly, feeling much relieved on hearing of her brother-in-law's death.

"Just to tell me I'm to have the few pounds Joe saved before he died."

"You may well say a few pounds. Joe was neither clever nor industrious enough to save much."

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"What for?"

"Because Mr. Skipsey hasn't come after all to take her to the Adelphi."

As Mrs. Prodgers helped her husband on with his overcoat next morning she whistled in a wheedling manner —

"Have you any idea how much money your brother Joe left?"

"Well, not exactly, but judging from the very respectful way the lawyers treat me I think it must be rather a pile. I am going there again to-day."

"Don't tell the girls, Peter, how much it is, even if you are sure. They'd worry me to death for dress and fad lace. Do you know that I suspect Mr. Skipsey is getting tired of Pollie? He didn't call for her yesterday evening, and the young man next door saw him walking with another young lady in the Strand."

"Very likely."

"I'm going to shop to-day, and I'll wake Jemmy up. Good-morning!"

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Mr. Skipsey caught sight of the sage-green trimmings on Mrs. Prodgers' bonnet, and tried to avoid her, but she did not intend that he should.

"Good-morning, Mr. Skipsey!" she says, with her blandest smile.

"Why, Mrs. Prodgers, who thought of seeing you so early?" the gentleman answers, suavely, as he takes the lady's tan-gloved hand between his white fingers.

"Well, I came to order some mourning for myself and the girls. Isn't it awkward to have to go in black just as the summer is coming on?" she says, regretfully.

"Mourning! Who are you going in black for?" he asks, hurriedly, and in great surprise.

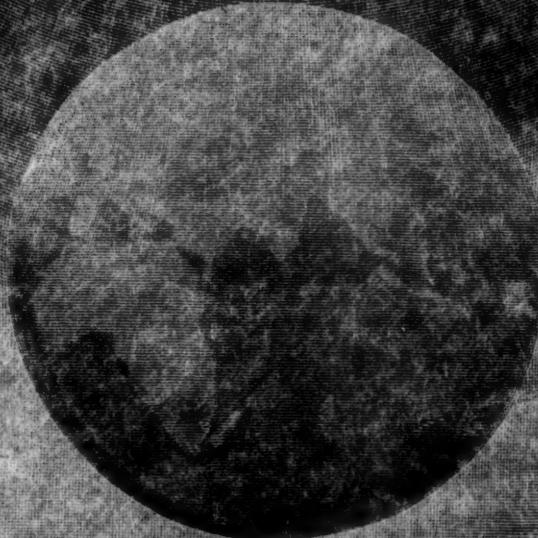
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"Good-morning, Mr. Skipsey!" she says, with her blanched smile.

"Why, Mrs. Prodgers, who thought of seeing you so early?" the gentleman answers, snarly, as he takes the lady's tan-gloved hand between his white fingers.

"Well, I came to order some mourning for myself and the girls. Isn't it awkward to have to go in black just as the summer is coming on?" she says, regretfully.

"Mourning! Who are you going in black for?" he asks, hurriedly, and in great surprise.

"Mr. Prodgers' brother, who has died in Melbourn, and as he has left my husband

all his money, and has nobody else to mourn for him, I think it is the very least we can do."

"Certainly, certainly! How fortunate that he has left his money to his brother! I suppose he made a fortune out there!" Mr. Skipsey says, looking searchingly in the expressionless face of the lady.

"Well, I don't know yet. The lawyer may tell Mr. Prodgers to-day."

"How is Pollie this morning?" he asks, with averted eyes.

"Not very well. She was rather queer last night, and went to bed early. She was rather pleased you didn't call last evening, as she couldn't have gone out if you had," she answers, carelessly.

"Oh, indeed! I had an old friend come to see me, and I didn't go out at all."

"Indeed!"

"But be sure to tell my dear Pollie that I will not fail to-night. I'll come round at eight, or a little after," he says, lightly.

"I'll tell Pollie!"

"Ah, if you'll be so kind. Please to give her my love. Good-morning!"

"Good-day!"

### CHAPTER III.

Mr. Skipsey is punctual to his time that evening; Miss Prodgers is waiting for him most anxiously, though she does not allow a shadow of anxiety to be visible in face or manner. Pollie Prodgers received her lover with the utmost coolness and indifference, as though she had been trained in deportment and self-control at a first-class ladies' seminary.

Her more exalted sisters in Belgrave and Mayfair could not have played their rôle better when angling for a coronet and a long rent-roll. To young women in Pollie Prodgers' position Mr. Skipsey, of Gorman and Hale, is a very eligible parti indeed.

Pollie is very neatly dressed in grey, with black introduced wherever it could be done, and she looks very nice, though her eyes and hair are so pale.

Mr. Skipsey had taken unusual pains with his toilet, and there is nothing vulgar or priggish about him. He is very solicitous and sympathetic in his inquiries about her health; and when he hinted that they must hurry, if they wanted to see the piece at the Adelphi, to his great surprise she declined to accompany him, explaining that her Uncle Joe was dead, and it would not look nice to be seen at a theatre while her mourning was in the hands of the dressmaker.

"Especially," the young lady continues, very gravely, "as uncle has left his money."

"How very fortunate that he has left his money to Mr. Prodgers. But I suppose he is his nearest relative?"

"Oh, yes. Uncle never married."

"How fortunate for yourself and your sisters!"

"Yes, it is a good thing that none of us are married. We may be able to settle better," the lady says, pointedly.

"Aw!" Mr. Skipsey ejaculates, pricking up his ears. "Well, dear, as you consider it wrong—er—in go to the theatre, you won't object to a stroll on the Embankment?" the gentleman insinuates, blandly.

"Yes; she would go for a stroll in the lovely moonlight, and enjoy the fresh air by the river. Whether the soothing influence of the warm air, and the sleepy ebb of the tranquil river awoke the dormant sentiment of his nature, or thinking of Joe Prodgers' money aroused his sordid passions, we cannot say; but this we can say, that he was not sitting beside Miss Prodgers on that garden seat on the Embankment half-an-hour before he proposed and was accepted.

On his return to Knaresbrook Street an hour later, Miss Prodgers assumed an air of importance. Leaving Mr. Skipsey on the steps, she rushed past her sister Sallie without taking any notice of her, turns the handle of the front parlour door sharply, and suddenly appears before her astonished parents, who are having

a quiet, private conversation about their unexpected good fortune.

"Oh, ma, Mr. Skipsey has proposed! Mr. Skipsey asked me to marry him, and I said yes; but I told him to come and see us all the same. Wasn't that right, ma?"

"Has he really made you an offer, Pollie?"

"Yes, ma," the young lady says, very demurely.

"Does he know about Joe's death?" Mr. Prodgers asked, in a hushed tone.

"Yes, I told him to-day. I had to go to Gorman and Hale's to get a bit of black for the girls."

"Ah, that's it. The idea of Joe's money gave you pluck to ask you to marry him. Nothing like money to loosen the tongue. Where is he now?"

"He is not far away, and I am going to fetch him," said Pollie hurried excitedly from the room.

"Well, I am glad to think Pollie will be off my hands. Your brother's money will do that much good, if no more. I've been setting Pollie down for the old maid of the family. We mustn't let Pollie or Mr. Skipsey know how much Joe has left, or any of the other girls. I can do with Sallie and Carrie, but Pollie is mistress. When she's married I shall feel more comfortable. Ah, here they come! Oh, Mr. Skipsey, I'm so pleased to hear that you have asked my Pollie to be your wife. I don't know what I shall do without her. I wouldn't part with my dear girl just now to anybody else in the world but you!"

Here Mrs. Prodgers drew forth her pocket-handkerchief, and, pressing it to her mouth, smothered a sob in it, or pretended to do so.

We will pass over the next twelve months, as we do not intend to follow the Prodgers' family during their transit from the ranks of the working classes to the pinnacle of wealth, which they eventually reached.

The past year had been a period of dire mortification, bitter heart-burnings, ludicrous blunders, ridiculous mistakes, and many sore disappointments to the ladies of the family, who brought all the trouble on themselves by their ineffectual efforts to plunge headlong in a mad vortex of fashionable dissipation without initiation, or any training whatever; while Peter Prodgers often declared to his intimate friends that he was happier when he had to ride on the top of a bus every day to his job as warehouseman in a City firm; the marmurings and complaints of his womankind worried him exceedingly.

The legacy left him by his late brother had surpassed his wildest dream of wealth, but it did not bring him peace.

His wife, son, and daughters tried their best to instil some notions of style or the ways of good society into his mind, but they tried in vain.

His brother, who had been looked upon as the scapgegoat of the family, who would never work when he was in England, and whose relatives were so much ashamed of him that they were glad to subscribe the money to take him to some other country, where he would have to depend on his own exertions.

After this Joe wrote occasionally to his friends, but as they did not answer him very promptly this correspondence dropped, his people in England not caring to acknowledge him, as they heard he had not been very successful in the land of his adoption.

For five years they had not heard anything of him, so they concluded that he was dead, and decided that all such thrifless creatures were better out of the way.

So his memory was fast fading from the minds of those who once knew him, his elder brother Peter being the only one out of a large circle of relatives who ever gave a thought or a sigh to the memory of poor unlucky Joe.

As for Mrs. Prodgers, she declared that she couldn't bear the sound of his name. When that admirable lady first heard that her husband's presence was required at the office of

a well-known firm of lawyers in Lincoln's Inn, and when, on his return home, he mentioned his brother's name, Mrs. Prodgers instantly jumped at the conclusion that there was trouble in store for her, with Joe at the bottom of it. He had either done something dreadful out there, or he was being sent home at the Colonial Government's expense, to be a burden to his relatives.

When Peter Prodgers hinted that Joe had left money, the idea tickled Mrs. Prodgers so much that she could have laughed heartily if she hadn't been furious at having her brother-in-law brought so vividly before her after the lapse of a whole decade.

"How did he get the money?" was the question she asked herself. "He never worked for it," was her answer to her own question.

When Mr. Prodgers hinted that she ought to buy mourning for herself and the girls, he looked daggers at him as she replied—

"I would if I were sure Joe left money enough to cover the expense—but I know he hasn't."

"How do you know how much Joe left, Harriet?"

"Maybe you're keeping it dark, Peter, which is most unkind of you, seeing the wife I've been to you!" Mrs. Prodgers said, sobbing bitterly.

"I'm going to Lincoln's Inn to-day, Harriet. You wait till you hear what the lawyer says. If there is money, you'll put on black for poor Joe!" he says, appealingly.

"I don't mind so long as I don't have to put my hand in my own pocket!"

Two evenings later, Peter Prodgers and his better half held council in the front parlor with closed doors.

Miss Prodgers was out with Mr. Skipsey. They had gone to the park to hear the birds play.

On their return, Mr. Skipsey was invited to supper.

After the third glass of bitter Mr. Prodgers' wine, very genial towards the world in general and his future son-in-law in particular.

"My dear fellow, I'm so pleased that you are going to be one of us. Pollie is a good girl, tho' I say it that shouldn't, maybe. My brother Joe left me more than I expected, and I don't mind doing the handsome when you marry my girl. I'm a plain man, Mr. Skipsey, and not given to speechifying. No more was my brother Joe; but when you marry my Pollie I don't mind handing you over five hundred pounds, and it will cost the likes quite another five hundred to rig the girl out and furnish your apartments. Won't it, Harriet?"

"Yes, quite that," Mrs. Prodgers assents, as she folds her hands with an air of placid content.

Mr. Skipsey's small, dark eyes twinkle with pleasure and surprise at the munificence of his future father-in-law.

The pompous shopwalker is very fond of money, and he can already imagine that he hears the jingle of gold and the rustle of banknotes.

On hearing her father's announcement of what he intended to give her as a marriage portion, Pollie drew herself up with a grace of triumph at her two sisters that Carrie met with dedit eyes.

Six months' mourning for poor Joe Prodgers is allowed to pass before Pollie Prodgers is married to Mr. James Skipsey.

The ceremony did not take place in St. George's, Hanover Square, or St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, or at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, but the church they were married in was not quite unfashionable.

The wedding was showy and extravagant, attracting a large crowd around the entrance to the church and the residence of the bride, and causing much noisy demonstration in the neighbourhood, a good deal of obstruction and trouble to the police, who felt much relieved when the last handful of rice and the last slipper were thrown, and the carriage that

bore the bridal pair away had turned the corner of the street; quietness reigned all the remainder of the day.

But the lull at 100, Knarsbrook Street was not of long duration.

The day following Pollie's wedding was an eventful one.

Peter Prodgers resigned his post in the City, and Mrs. Prodgers threw up her position as sweater at Gorman and Hales, much to the surprise of the employees of that establishment.

A day or two later a broker's van removed all the furniture from the Knarsbrook Street premises. Then came a railway conveyance from the Chatham and South-Eastern, and took away a load of trunks, boxes, valises, carpet-bags, etc., to Victoria Station.

When Mr. and Mrs. Skipsey returned from Paris at the end of their fortnight's honeymoon, they found the house in Knarsbrook Street shut up, the parlour blinds drawn down behind a large poster that announced to all whom it might concern that the premises were "To Let," and an old woman left in charge by the landlord informed the happy pair that "Mister and Missus" Prodgers were gone to Hastings for a month.

"They ain't a-comin' back 'ere no more," she adds. "They was left a' cap o' money, so when they comes back they won't come 'ere. My gov'nor says they got about a million o' money."

Mr. Skipsey feels hot and dizzy.

Mrs. Skipsey compresses her thin lips into a hard, bluish line across her pale face.

"The aly old beggar! I'll be even with him yet!" he hisses, clutching his teeth and hands.

"You shouldn't take notice of what that old charwoman says, and you mustn't call me names, Mr. Skipsey," the lady says, tartly.

"That be hanged, Mrs. Skipsey! I feel that I am done—regularly had by my vinegar ed father-in-law!"

"Mr. Skipsey!"

And so 100, Knarsbrook Street was shut up, and the weary tread of the ill-treated maid-servants is no longer heard in those dreary, draughty rooms.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"What on earth makes you think that I am not what I seem? Do explain, darling! What makes you think so?"

"Well, I can hardly explain. You seem so superior to any of the clerks I know."

"In what way, Florrie?"

"Well, your manners are more refined, your air more stylish; you are different."

"Nonsense! You flatter me, Florrie. Are you sorry that I am different to those clerks you know? Do you regret this air of superiority of which you complain?"

There is a slight ring of sarcasm in the tone that jars on the sensitive ears of the girl to whom it is addressed.

There is a pause, which we will take advantage of to describe the two young people whose conversation we have just recorded.

The girl is tall, and what some people would call a very genteel-looking girl, while others might style her a very ladylike girl. Here is the slender, willowy figure usual with those who grow very tall while they are very young; but she has none of the gawky awkwardness or many angles of an overgrown girl. On the contrary, she possessed all the subtle grace of early womanhood. She has what novelists call a flower face—that is, a small oval, very fair and sweet, and perfect in shape, with two wonderful blue eyes, large and liquid, full of changeful lights and shadows, but mostly beaming with womanly tenderness. Her hair is of that deep rich auburn so seldom seen. It is long, wavy, and abundant, and suits her dear, white skin and beautiful eyes. Her dress is that of a young girl of lowly position; she wears a print gown, very neat and pretty, and fresh from the hands of the ironer. It

hangs about the graceful figure in smooth, shining folds, the bodice fitting her with a perfection that a duchess might envy. Her large straw hat is the fashionable shape, prettily but inexpensively trimmed. Her appearance is that of a young woman belonging to a superior grade of the working classes, though a certain air of high breeding and refinement, and a dignity of movement that seemed characteristic of her, always impressed the beholder that Florrie Fosbrook is a lady by birth. The words she addressed to her companion at the opening of this chapter might be applied to herself. She looks a very superior young person indeed.

Her companion's appearance is even more imposing than her own. Standing six foot one in height, he is a young giant in muscular development, and has the trained, upright carriage that is inseparable from the man who has been drilled for the army. He looks barely twenty, and his bearing is that of one who has been all his life accustomed to many sports and out-of-door exercises more than the confinement of a clerk's desk. He is handsome, and his refined air bespeaks the English gentleman.

His dress is very quiet and unassuming, but faultless; that he is superior to his companion is patent to any observer; that they are lovers is a fact quite as patent.

Their meeting is a clandestine one, the Mall in St. James's Park the chosen spot. It is evident they do not wish to attract attention, as they walk slowly arm-in-arm by the railings of the enclosure from the point opposite the Duke of York steps to that opposite Buckingham Palace; but though they shrink from observation, they cannot quite avoid it. They would be the observed of all observers but for the deepening dusk that partly screens them. All who pass them turn to gaze after the young Hercules in the suit of grey check, with cricket-cap of the same, and the tall, slim figure in the print gown, and the big straw hat turned up behind.

"You don't answer me, Florrie. Are you so very angry?" he asks, in a tone in which there is a suspicion of hauteur.

"Not angry, but very much hurt by your unkindness."

"By my brutal conduct and beastly temper, Florrie, don't be so very angry with me."

"And don't you get in such a passion, Lance. This is a new revelation," she answers, with a little forced laugh.

"Florrie, there is only one way out of our difficulty; let me get married," he says, in a voice of suppressed passion and emotion.

"And what would become of us afterwards?" she asks, coolly.

"Why, do the best we can. I'll have to work and struggle for you. I'll have to turn journalist."

"That is easier said than done," she says, with a little rippling laugh.

"And what would you have me do, darling?" he asks, in a calmer tone.

"Wait. Is there no prospect of advancement where you are?"

"No, I'm afraid not; but you are out of a situation at present. Oh, Florrie, darling, do not look out for another. For my sake let us cast our fortunes together."

"And your friends, Lance—how about your friends? Just fancy how they'd scorn the poor girl you married!" she says, with a touch of bitterness.

"Hang my friends! This is your own idea, Florrie. It is just a fad. You do not know how my friends—and they are very few—will receive you."

"Yes, I do. They are above me, ever so much."

"How do you know?"

"I can tell what they are by studying you, Lance," she says, sadly, as she looks in his face with those wistful, earnest eyes.

"Aw—but, Florrie, don't take this situation dear; be my wife instead."

"Don't ask me, Lance—don't, dear—at least, not now. I can never become a member of any family unless I know beforehand that I am welcome."

"Then you do not love me, Florrie!"

"Oh, Lance, how can you?" the girl exclaims, in a tone of unutterable pain, and clasping her small hands in an expression of deepest woe.

The young man is startled by her emotion, and catches both hands in his strong grasp.

"Forgive me, Florrie, darling; you see what a mad fool I am."

"No, no, you are my own darling Lance, whom I will always love while life lasts," she says, passionately.

"How can that be when you doubt me in everything?"

"Yes, I doubt a great deal. I do not believe that you are a City clerk with a paupers salary not sufficient to pay for your boots."

"And you won't marry a City clerk, Florrie?"

"No; I think the little money I have been saving up against our marriage had better be spent in paying my passage to Australia or New Zealand. It will be sufficient for that, and I may be able to get a better situation out there than I can in England, and an obstruction will be removed from your path."

"Florrie, hush! Don't talk like that! What do you take me for?" he protests.

"I take you for a dear, silly old darling, who would plunge yourself into no end of trouble and misfortune if I were silly enough to permit it."

"Then you won't marry me, Florrie?"

"No, sir; not at present."

"Not until you return from the Colonies, perhaps?"

"No; if I go to the Colonies I shall never return to England again. I shall not be married until I am older and wiser. I am not yet eighteen, and there's plenty of time."

"But, darling, you are so unkind. My relations seem to be an obstacle. I am willing to throw them over for your sake. Will not that satisfy you?"

"No. I must be in a position to be presented to your relations as your intended wife. They must receive me as one of the family, and they must accept me willingly. But there are other obstacles that you seem to forget, dear Lance. I am an orphan. I have nobody belonging to me in the world—never had, except Mrs. Finch. She ought to know who my parents are, but won't tell me."

"What does it matter, darling? I want to marry you, not your parents. Do you think I am such a cad as to throw over the girl I love because she does not know her parents? Bah!"

"Mrs. Finch will be angry if I am out late. I don't wish to vex her; she has been very kind to me. There is the tattoo! It is ten o'clock. Let us go!"

"Florrie, how long will this last? I'll throw up my present billet and get something better. With a better income we can marry. I don't deny that I've been a scapegoat, but I'll marry and settle down. Oh, Florrie! don't send me away in despair!"

"I cannot change my resolution not to marry until I see my way clear. Oh, step out, Lance. I don't care about a scolding!"

Florrie, glancing sideways from under her broad-brimmed hat, could see her lover shrink from observation, and walked with averted face as they pass the front of Buckingham Palace. At Buckingham Gate Florrie stops.

"Let us say good-night here, Lance. I would rather go by myself. I shall run all the way; it is not far. Good-night, dear!"

"Good-night! To-morrow evening, at the same time and place," and, stooping, he kissed the fair, upturned face.

\* \* \* \*

A lovely June night—lovely even in London, where there are no meadow odours, no scented hedgerows, no babbling brooks, no sweet bird-

music trailing on the dim woodlands, none of the many rustic sounds peculiar to the country to charm eye or ear. The stars come out one by one, twinkling in the grey and primrose light of the warm summer dusk.

A well-dressed crowd promenaded slowly about Buckingham Palace. There is a State ball to-night at that royal and lonely residence. It is one of the occasions on which a certain portion of the middle-class British public turn out and hang about the neighbourhood of Buckingham Palace and St. James's Park, filled with a morbid desire to see the outside of one or two royal carriages, and catch a glimpse of some of the toilettes, if possible.

Pressing quietly through the crowd is a tall, gentlemanly young man, and clinging to his arm is a tall, graceful girl, who seems to fear getting separated from her companion in the throng. Making their way through the Buckingham Gate, they walked by the railing of the enclosure, and passed through the gate opposite Marlborough House. They followed the broad walk, and reached the picturesque bridge that spans the ornamental water. Here the lovers pause.

"Oh, how pretty! What lovely moonlight, and what placid water!" the girl exclaims, with enthusiasm.

"Why, you are quite romantic, Florrie!"

"I always stop when I pass this way to admire this scene. Whether in winter or summer I admire it. What dim, mysterious shadows lie behind those old trees, drooping, fringe-like, from the bank! How restful they look, with their heavy foliage bathing in the tranquil waters!"

"Why, Florrie, you are quite—or—romantic, as I remarked just now. I shouldn't wonder if you don't take to writing poetry, you know."

"I am not gifted in that way," she answers, with a little rippling laugh.

"Ah, Florrie, dear! when we are married I hope I shall be able to give you a lovely home with grounds like these, and a lake like this!" he says, warmly, as he imprisons her right hand and draws her close to him—so close that she inhales the perfume of the half-blown rosebuds in his buttonholes.

"Oh, how sweet your roses smell! I didn't notice them before."

"You may have them, dear," he says, gallantly, as he undoes the posy from the front of his coat and fastens it on the front of her bodice.

"Thank you very much."

"They are red. Isn't a red rose emblematic of love?"

And when the stars come out, Nora,  
We'll go forth together,  
And wander 'neath the orchard boughs,  
In the balmy summer weather,  
When parting at the garden gate,  
With a lingering good-night,  
I'll give you a red rose, darling,  
When the summer moon shines bright.  
When the summer moon shines bright, Nora,  
When the summer moon shines bright,  
I'll give you a red rose, darling,  
When the summer moon shines bright.

"You will have everybody staring at you, Florrie says, laughing merrily.

"What of that, Flo? I—"

"But I want you to be serious just now, as I cannot stay long. I am going to my new situation to-morrow. I say the lady to-day, and she wishes me to commence my duties to-morrow."

"But I shall see you again to-morrow, when we shall arrange our future mode of correspondence."

"No, not to-morrow, dear Lance. I shall let you know in a day or two when I am coming to Mrs. Finch's. I shall direct all my letters there, and you can meet me at Mrs. Finch's whenever I can get out."

"But where is this place? You have not told me yet," he says, very seriously.

"Lance, I cannot. You know how impulsive you are. You would come to the place and make things very unpleasant for me."

"And you will not let me know where you are going?" he says, in a tone of suppressed anger.

"Oh, Lance! don't look so angry, but this lady may not like, or allow, her servants to receive visitors, and you know that I have only my good name to depend upon."

"You need not fear; I shall not go there. Who are those people you are going to?"

"I forgot their name. It is not a nice name, and they are funny people, very rich and very extravagant, but not ladies in the proper sense of the word. They have taken a place by the river, where they intend giving a series of garden and boating parties, and otherwise make a grand display of their wealth during the season."

"Well, Flo, you must have your own way, and I must not expect to see you except at Mrs. Finch's."

"At first, Lance. When I explain to the lady she may not mind," the girl answers, timidly. "She began to fear that she was going too far.

"Well, we'll see, dear. Shall we cross the bridge?"

"No, Lance; am in a hurry to-night. Let us turn back," Florrie answers, with a forced smile, for she felt a shadow coming between them.

During their walk back to Buckingham Gate through the moonlight this feeling deepened. There is a restraint not felt before. On the pavement by the Palace, wall Florrie stops.

"I will say good-night here," she says, extending her hand.

"Good-night for an indefinite period."

"You are unkind in your remark."

"And you are very unkind to me in your arrangements," he answers, with a mirthless laugh.

"Well, good-night, dear; I'll see how I get on. I'll write to-morrow evening, if I possibly can."

"Good-night, Flo!" and, lifting his hat gallantly, he turned on his heel and strode away.

#### CHAPTER V.

"Yes, ma, you did quite right, for once, in advertising for a young person as parlourmaid. You mustn't decide too soon if there are many applicants. You must look out for a very smart girl. You can form an idea if she's been used to the ways of the upper classes; if so, she'll be able to give you the tip how to lay out the rooms, and what trifles and nicknacks you ought to buy for the purpose."

"To be sure. There's so many things I want to learn that I don't like asking the butler to explain. I can't let him know I'm so ignorant, don't you know. I oughtn't to have that French maid for you girls. I can't understand a word she says, and the young person don't seem to understand a word I say. Look at her airs, and look at the butler's consequence! He looks more like the gay' nor than your pa! They both put on their airs because they know we are parvenus, as they call 'em."

"Parvenus, ma! I haven't patience with you!" Sallie says, shaking her frizely black curls at her mother.

"You shut up, Sallie, and let me be. It's all your fault that ma had that French creature!" Carrie says, hotly, standing up in her mother's defense.

Carrie always took her mother's part against her sisters when there was any argument on the tapis, as there is at present, Carrie looking for reward in various other ways afterwards.

"I oughtn't to have such uppish sort of people about me at first."

"For goodness' sake, ma, don't use such vulgar expressions!" Carrie exclaims, merrily. "We don't seem to get on at all. Think of the money it costs to get into society, the money you laid out this last year, and it all seems to be thrown away. I know what society thinks of us. It looks upon us as intruders, no matter how much money you spend. You're that 'loud, vulgar woman in

Pont Street,' and as for Sally and I, if we only wear a fashionably-made gown, or hat, 'Look at the Prodgers' girls, vulgar things! Think of the money we'll have to pay Jinks, the butler, and he's only laughing at us. Then there's pa; he won't alter his style, no matter how expansive his clothes are. When you have a few of those you call friends here, pa don't show his face among them. He goes to the nearest public-house, and passes the evening in the private bar—to get out of your way, he says, and have a quiet glass and pipe. Ugh! Then look at 'Arry! he hasn't two ideas in his head. He tries to be a gentleman, but he is only a master and a dude. I'll be glad when we get out of this street, and are settled in our new house by the river, where there won't be any opposite neighbours to look across from their windows into ours," Carrie says, peevishly.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know; I do my best. I'm nearly worried out of my life. I'll be nothing but a skeleton presently," Mrs. Prodgers says, complainingly.

"Come in," Sallie calls, in answer to a tap at the door. It was opened by a female domestic, who, ignoring the presence of the young ladies, addresses the mistress with—

"If you please, m', there's a lot en 'm waitin'!"

"A lot of what?"

"Young persons after the advertisement."

"I'll come, Jane."

"There! You ought to dress yourself better today, as you're going to see those people and choose a parlourmaid. Servants who have been used to good places are just as particular about the families they engage with as the ladies who engage them. We want a nice girl, who will give us all the tips about the furniture and the decorations of the rooms, and how to arrange the flowers on the mantelpiece. It is an art, I can tell you, rather difficult to learn for people who have not been used to it. Sallie says, in a tone of authority.

"I wish you were coming with me, Sallie," her mother says, regretfully. "You would be able to judge which is the most suitable or best adapted for the situation," the elder lady says, as she turns the handle of the door.

"What a good opinion you have of Sallie's judgment, ma," Carrie observes, with a pat.

"Hold your tongue, Carrie, do," Mrs. Prodgers says, in a severe tone, as she looks back with lowering brows at her youngest daughter.

"Ain't it an awful bore not to know what to do with your mornings! Lolling about in sofas with a silly novel is awful!"

"You were not satisfied when you lived in Pimlico, and had to do crewel-work to buy yourself clothes. Why don't you do it now to pass some of the time that hangs so heavy on your hands? You could make some pretty things for the rooms, you know."

"I think I'll put on my things and go and see the Warleys."

"What! Are you mad, Carrie Prodgers? The Warleys! Is that how you mean to keep up our respectability? You know how thick Harry used to be with Rose, and the way we were all in about it. He looks higher now, but we never know what may happen. Oh no! You must drop the Warleys, and wait patiently till we find some more eligible friends. A golden key will be sure to open the door of society to us if ma only plays her cards right."

"If we get any footing in society, we must play our cards well, and get married the first chance we have. We must not refuse any reasonable offer. I shall be glad to get rid of my very name, Prodgers; and Sallie combined. Good gracious! what could me be thinking of to give us such names—Polly, Sallie, Carrie!"

"Ah! here comes ma! I wonder how she has succeeded!"

Enter Mrs. Prodgers, breathing very hard, and looking very hot and red in the face.

"Oh, girls, I've engaged one, and I only

"With you had been with me to see her?" adds Sallie languidly.

"Good-looking, indeed! She's the handsomest girl I ever saw! What do you think of that?"

"According to your idea, ma," laughs Carrie, derisively.

"Well, if she's coming to-morrow we'll see," Sallie retorts, hotly.

"I insisted upon her coming to-morrow, to help arrange the rooms at Hazel Hollow."

"Well, I hope she'll suit, and I hope Carrie won't be saucy to her," Sallie says, with a faint smile.

"She mustn't. The young girl is a perfect lady in manner and appearance. How she comes to be a servant is a mystery to me; there are so many ways for a girl like that to get a genteel living besides going to service. One would think it would be the last thing such a girl would think of."

"Perhaps she's too good for her place, above her business, too much of a lady," Sallie remarks.

"Mall find that a smart girl like that'll have a lot of fellows coming after her," Carrie says.

"I distinctly gave her to understand that I allow no followers, and she told me that she had no followers."

"Just fancy our nearest neighbour at Hazel Hollow is a titled lady!" Sallie says, exultingly.

"Ah, to be sure—Lady Lyle! I wonder how we shall get on with her?" Mrs. Prodgers answers, reflectively.

"Get on with her! We must cultivate her, ma. They say she has been very beautiful. She is not very old, but some great trouble has turned her hair white," Sallie says, with quite a society air.

"Listen to Sallie, ma! She is getting on, getting quite a fine lady. Can't she put on?"

"She is about the best of us. She doesn't so often forget her manners as we do."

"We're sure I study my part close enough, but I don't act in private, or for the benefit of you and Sallie. Wasn't she artful to throw Geoff Lawson over as soon as she heard you had money left him?"

"Carrie! Good gracious, child, you will have to drop your commonplace talk," streams Mrs. Prodgers, getting very red in the face.

"You vulgar girl!" puts in Sallie.

"You shut up, and mind your own business, Carrie retorts, firing up.

"Girls, girls! I am quite ashamed of you both!"

"If you are going to behave like this at Hazel Hollow, you had better stay where you are."

"And—I'm going to Hazel Hollow, and mean to enjoy myself with garden-parties and water-parties. Harry will have some of the best men in town to his cricket and smoking parties, and I'll promise to keep the tennis lawn lively."

## CHAPTER VI.

"And that is your ladyship's opinion of the owner of Hazel Hollow," asks Lady Lyle's extremely fashionable visitor, at her pretty residence between London and Henley.

"That is, my dear Mrs. Delmotte. I have just expressed my opinion of the Prodgers. As their nearest neighbour, I feel bound to call upon them, and I declare that I have never met people so utterly ignorant of the ways of society as Mrs. Prodgers and her daughters. But they are dear girls for all that, so gushing, amiable, and so respectful to anybody they really know in their superior in the society circle. Their mother is so hospitable, with all the lavish display and reckless profusion of vulgar ambition." Lady Lyle sits back languidly in her lounge-chair, as though

the speech she had just given utterance to was longer and more exhaustive than she usually indulged in.

"Dear, dear! What a pity such people should ever become so rich, and that their wealth should give them *entrée* to the most exclusive circles. But if nobody takes them up, we must bid good-bye to the entertainments at Hazel Hollow. Its doors will be closed against us, and it is one of the most delightful places on the river."

"It is not to be thought of, my dear Mrs. Delmotte. We cannot afford to lose such wealthy neighbours, who dispense hospitality with such lavish liberality. I certainly regret that one of our own set has not taken Hazel Hollow, though I feel sure that before many weeks have passed we shall meet all the best people, everybody worth knowing, at their table and in their rooms."

"Prodgers! What a horrible name! Dear, dear! whenever I pronounce that name I feel as though I were giving utterance to some—or slangy expression." Mrs. Delmotte fans herself languidly and smiles blandly, though she is filled with mild horror of the paroxysms of Hazel Hollow.

"Did you ever hear how those people got their money?" Mrs. Delmotte inquires, insinuatingly, of her graceful hostess.

"I think I have heard. Let me see, wasn't it in trade—leather, or fallow, or something?"

"No—no, my dear Lady Lyle, nothing quite so dreadful as that. A great-aunt—or a grandfather—died somewhere abroad, and left them a lot of money—millions!"

"Ah, that's better—more satisfactory. It is easier to tolerate them. We must draw the line at shopkeepers, you know."

"Very true, dear. But, really, Mr. Prodgers amuses one though he bores one dreadfully. He drops his hat so recklessly, just as he is trying to speak correctly. Then the girls, with their ma and pa, and that mincing masher, young Prodgers, with his liep, and his eye-glass, he thinks every girl that looks him is ready to fall in love with him."

"I don't care for Harry at all," Lady Lyle laughs.

"I must say adieu now, dear. I have passed a most delightful hour with you. How quiet you are here, dear?" the lady lispers, as she shakes out her skirts, and smooths down a few refractory tresses preparatory to taking her leave.

"Have you forgotten how lonely this place is sometimes, dear?" Lady Lyle asks, in a piqued tone.

"Ah, sometimes. You receive some of the best people here, and Lord Lyle is very good company."

"The more company I see, the more lonely I feel when they are gone. As for dear Jack, he is very good to me, but he cannot be with me always. For a stepson Jack is a marvel of kindness and attention. In his last moments my husband was anxious about his son. He feared that Jack might cause me any trouble, but his fears were groundless. My stepson has been more comfort than trouble to me!"

"Lord Lyle is a very fine young man. What a consolation it must be to have such a true friend in your widowhood!"

"Yes, dear. We get on very well together."

"The Willows is a very pretty place indeed. I had no idea of its being so charming!" Mrs. Delmotte says, with her habitual simper, as she places her gold-rimmed glasses, and looks through the French window at the radiant blooms beyond.

"Yes, I must not think myself quite lonely while I have my flowers and dear old Nero," Lady Lyle says, as she pats the head of the noble mastiff standing beside her, and who never seems to leave his mistress two minutes together.

"Once more good-bye, dear. I have several calls to make yet. I always linger longest at The Willows."

"It is too near Hazel Hollow. The malignancy of the latter quite extinguishes the simple prettiness of my poor little place," Lady Lyle says, holding out her hand to her departing guest, under the hanging creepers, with Nero beside her.

"Good morning, dear! I hope to see you to-morrow."

"If it does not rain you may. Good morning," and the two women kissed each other on the cheek, and parted.

Lady Lyle, standing on the topmost of six stone steps, leading from the portico to the lawn, watches her visitor move towards her waiting carriage; and as the distance widens between the two ladies the expression changes on the face of the mistress of The Willows; the smile fades, and a vicious light darkens the beautiful eye, and an evil expression distorts her handsome face.

"What a prying, inquisitive creature she is. I hate you, Mrs. Delmotte, with your oily tongue and grand air. I hate you for your persistency in trying to pry into my cupboard and expose the skeleton you suspect I have hidden there. Ah! bah!"

And Lady Lyle slammed the door of her bijou house, and went back to her lounge and her novel, while Mrs. Delmotte's barouche rolls along the pleasant road.

There is an amused smile on her comely face as she lets her white parasol, with its deep lace flounces, droop forward to keep off the sun's rays.

"It is delightful to be able to unravel our friend's mysteries. Who is Lady Lyle? Who was she before Lord Lyle married her? She has a history, I am sure. There is a doubled-down page in her life, I have not the slightest doubt. How beautiful she is! What a figure! graceful and poised as a girl of seventeen! And then her hair. What an abundance she has got, and as white as silver, not a dark hair amid the whole mass by which one might judge what the colour had been. Her white hair does not make her look a day older. She may be thirty-five, though she would pass anywhere for twenty-five."

The Lady of The Willows is not to enjoy much rest on this particular day. No sooner has Mrs. Delmotte's carriage disappeared round a curve of the road than another equipage rolls up to the portico.

"More callers! What a bore, and I so anxious to finish this novel. Those odious people from Hazel Hollow, too. Ah! well, I suppose it is one of the penalties of being in society to have to bear with those we hate and despise. They soon return my call. Dear me! what hats those girls have! Walking advertisements for a rose show."

Peeping through the creepers at the window Lady Lyle sees Mrs. Prodgers and her daughters alight from their victoria, and ascend the portico. My lady glides back among her cushions just as the door opens, and her grave, dignified butler announces the ladies from Hazel Hollow.

Lady Lyle, smiling in pleased surprise, receives her guests as courteously as though they were the dearest friends she had in the world, instead of this scandal-spreading, over-dressed trio, standing inside the door and staring helplessly at the hostess, as she advances gracefully, fanning herself slowly, and smiling sweetly as she welcomes her new neighbours with much courtesy.

"My dear Mrs. Prodgers, I am delighted to see you!" she says, in the low, cultured tones peculiar to her, as she holds out her pretty useless white hands to the older lady, "and the dear girls," her ladyship adds, turning to Sallie and Carrie, and kissing them on the cheek.

"Your ladyship is very kind," Mrs. Prodgers manages to stammer, being quite overpowered by Lady Lyle's gracious presence. She takes the seat her hostess indicates so gratefully, her handsome gown of golden brown brocade gleaming with a rich gloss in the subdued light.

Mrs. Prodgess has grown more robust than she was in those days when she doled out weak coffee to her family in the back parlour at 100, Knarsbrook-street, Pimlico, and superintended the manufactory of fancy goods. She, who had been so scrappy in those days, can now display a well-developed bust and full figure—whether real or made up, is best known to her dressmaker.

Sallie and Carrie are likewise so much improved as to be quite unrecognisable by those who knew them in the old days. They look very nice in their big black lace hats, with crowns piled up with roses in every stage of development—from the tiny embryo rose to the half-opened bud, and from the half-blown rose to the full-blown rose in all its pride to the full-blown rose crushed and broken. Their tailor-made gowns fit them like their gloves, and there is not a suspicion of awkwardness about them. If their grammar was not a little faulty, and their conversation interspersed with expressions decidedly slangy, an observer would believe they had been "to the manner born." Yet Sallie, with her quiet primness, and Carrie, with her robust health and unflagging spirits, form a striking contrast to the fascinating hostess, who, by the way, has not been formally introduced to the reader, Miriam—Lady Lyle, relict of the late Baron Lyle, and stepmother of John, the present Baron Lyle, only son of the late lord by his first wife Edith.

But his second wife, Frances Lady Lyle. "Who was she?" is a question that has never been satisfactorily solved, and is a secret best known to herself. That she is charming and clever, with a fatal fascination that makes her a dangerous woman among men, is a fact patent to all whom she honours with her friendship.

Lady Lyle is above the medium height of women, and is graceful and elegant in every pose and movement. She is the sculptor's ideal of perfection, her figure not being too full, nor yet too slender. Her's is a face that time in its flight seems to touch with a very light finger indeed—a face moulded to ensnare men's hearts, and play sad havoc with them. Her cheeks are as pure and smooth as the leaves of a white rose, while her hair—long, thick, and wavy—is as white as silver, and piled up in great coils on her stately head.

What awful shock, what great horror, what terrible illness can have whitened her magnificent hair? Time has not done it. What was its original colour? Was it raven black, or the hue of the golden marigold? What evil has it wrought in the past? What slaves has it ensnared in its meshes? What hopes has it helped to blight? What lives has it helped to wreck?

"How old can she be?" is the first problem the stranger tries to solve.

"How much over thirty can she be with those scarlet lips, and luminous eyes, and smooth, creamy cheeks? How much under thirty can she be with those piled-up silvery coils?"

In strange contrast with her whitened hair are her eyes—dark, luminous, beautiful, passionate eyes, that give a weird charm to her face!

"Ah, how happy you are here, dear Lady Lyle!" sispers Mrs. Prodgess, in the ringing tone she always uses to those who are above her in the social scale.

"Not quite so happy as the mistress of Hazel Hallow ought to be," the hostess answers smilingly.

"There is so much worry that I sometimes feel I could sit down and cry. What between servants and tradespeople, I feel I should like to run away from it all," the visitor says complainingly. "I was in hopes that I had such a gem of a parlourmaid. She told me when I engaged her that she had no followers; but yesterday, as my two daughters were walking along the road, who should they see going on in front of them but this girl in the company

of a gentleman. Just fancy that—a young gentleman in boating flannels!"

"Boating flannels, Lady Lyle!" Sallie says, in a vixenish tone.

"Ah! yes, blue-striped flannels, with cap to match. I could not catch a glimpse of his face, but his figure was quite familiar to me. I have seen that blue-striped suit before," adds Carrie, with a gesture of triumph.

"Ah!" her ladyship says, with a rippling laugh. "I know a young gentleman who wears blue-striped boating flannels, with cap to match. But it would not be him dear. Your parlour-maid, didn't you say? Oh, dear, no."

"Whoever he may be, the girl must be a very forward young person to be seen with a gentleman along a country road, in a strange neighbourhood, where she is at service. She is very nice-looking, and I suppose thinks something of herself."

"Pretty is she? A pretty face is always a delight to the eyes, whether it belongs to a maid-servant or a countess," answers the cultured tones of a young fellow, who strides into the room through the open French window just in time to hear Mrs. Prodgess's last observation.

"Down! Nero. Oh, it's Jack. For goodness' sake, do be quiet, Jack, and don't agitate Mrs. Prodgess with your pranks," Lady Lyle exclaims, holding her hands up appealingly to the young man, who has pulled his cricket cap off, and is bowing with mingled grace and clumsiness to the ladies, his handsome face glowing with mirth and high spirits, while the big mastiff gambols round him, and barks his welcome.

"No, mammy, dear, I hope I won't agitate the ladies. Come, mammy introduce me," and he bowed again in mock ceremony.

"This is Lord Lyle, Mrs. Prodgess, of whom you heard so much." Lady Lyle introduces her fine young kinsman to the visitors. The two girls stare at him, and at one another in bewildered amazement.

"Does your dog bite?" exclaims Sallie, shrinking back from Nero with that fear and aversion with which the low-born always regard dumb animals, especially dogs.

"No, certainly not. Old Nero hasn't a tooth to bite with. I am going to show the young ladies your famous orchids and roses if you will let me, mammy, if you will kindly step through this window. Here's the old dog ready; he means to come also." The young man passed out on to the lawn as he spoke when the dog went capering after him, Sallie, and Carrie following more gracefully.

Mrs. Prodgess is indulging in a hearty laugh at the idea of a great big fellow like Jack calling Lady Lyle mammy.

"And now, madam, while the young people are out of the way, may I crave your ladyship's attention for a few moments," the elder lady says, as she passes her handkerchief over her hot face.

"Certainly, my dear madam. Have you anything particular to say to me?" the hostess asks, as she tries to compose herself to listen to her guest.

"I hope your ladyship won't consider me a bore, especially as I am only obliging a gentleman I have never seen," Mrs. Prodgess says, gaspingly, and growing very red in the face.

"My dear madam, I shall be most happy to hear anything you have got to say."

"Well, your ladyship must have heard before this how my husband got his money, through his brother emigrating with the intention of going to the goldfields."

"I think I heard something about it," Lady Lyle says, with a little sigh of resignation, as she folds her small hands and prepares to listen to some of the gold-digger's adventures.

## CHAPTER VII.

"From what I have heard, my brother-in-law had to tramp hundreds of miles on foot,

and starving, for he had but very little money when he went away.

"One day, when at the last extremity, he passed a man lying by the wayside. Seeing that he had a wallet and some other luggage with him, and thinking they contained food, my brother resolved to ask him for a little help. Stooping over the prostrate man to wake him, as he thought, he found he was not asleep, but dying. He was quite sensible, but past all earthly aid. He begged my brother-in-law to stay with him—it was so awful to die alone in that desolate place. Joseph Prodgess promised to stay with him, and the old man told him where he could find a brandy flask and food, and said that he could have all he possessed after he was dead. Joe thought that would not be much, but later on he knew different. The old man lingered through the night; but the next day, feeling himself sinking, he called my brother-in-law to him, and told him where to find a sum of money sewed in part of the clothing he had on. He then confided to my brother-in-law that, when struck down with his last illness, he was on his way to secure an enormous quantity of gold that was concealed at a place which he would describe—that he had learned the secret of the hiding-place from an old friend who had died on the way to it. He gave him a written paper containing directions how to get to the spot where the hidden treasure was buried. Well, the old man died, and Joseph buried him on the spot, and was soon en route for the place where the treasure was hidden."

"Ah! I was going to observe that I never knew anybody who went to the gold fields," interrupts Lady Lyle. "But now I come to think—there was one, an old friend, who went out there; but he found no gold, for he came back poorer than he went out, and died poor."

A flush of crimson steals into the pure white cheeks, and her big dark eyes flash with unnatural brilliancy. Lady Lyle is getting interested.

"Well, my lady," Mrs. Prodgess continues, as she mops her hot face, "before Joseph Prodgess reached his destination he fell in with an Englishman, wandering like himself, but with this difference: Joseph had an object in view—a goal to reach. The stranger was wandering aimlessly, not knowing or caring where he was going to. He was quite destitute; but in spite of his misery it was easy to see that he was a gentleman.

"Joseph Prodgess asked the stranger to join him, but he did not make him acquainted with the secret of the hidden gold he was in search of, though they arranged to travel together, and many difficulties were to be overcome before they reached the end of their journey. On that account Joseph had to take the stranger into his confidence, and avail himself of his ability, education and good sense. They reached their destination, and found in enormous quantity of gold. They went to Melbourne, and everything they touched seemed to turn to gold. Every speculation succeeded, and so it went on for fourteen years. Neither ever married. Their wealth would go to the next-of-kin."

"Two years ago my brother-in-law died, and, with the exception of a few legacies to hospitals and personal friends, the bulk of his money was left to my husband."

"But his partner!" gasps Lady Lyle, in a choking voice, quite overcome by her emotion, which, with all her tact, she cannot conceal from Mrs. Prodgess, who glanced suspiciously through her pale eyelashes at Lady Lyle.

"His partner! Yes, my lady, that's what I'm a coming to. It is all along of a lister Mr. Prodgess had this morning from Mr. Stewart that I called upon your ladyship."

"Stewart. And it is he, is it? It is that meddlesome old fool. I thought he was dead and gone long ago," Lady Lyle exclaims, thrown off her guard, in her surprise and ex-

“Will you be kind enough to tell me, Mrs. Prodgers, where Mr. Stewart is now?”

“In Paris.”

“Oh!”

“And he is coming here?”

“Ah!”

“Mr. Stewart is most anxious to know his late partner's friends, as he has been so long out of England that he has scarcely any left himself.” Mrs. Prodgers manages to explain in a very awkward way, for she sees that Lady Lyle is listening anxiously for anything she may have to say about Mr. Stewart. She sees that her charming hostess is deeply agitated. She sees the terrible struggle to control that agitation, and conceal it from her visitor's observation, but, clever woman of the world as she is, she has failed to do so.

“Mr. Stewart seems to be well acquainted with this neighbourhood. He says that he had no idea of visiting us at all until he heard that we had taken Hazel Hollow. He says that he remembers that Hazel Hollow is not far from 'The Willows,' where some old friends of his lived before he went abroad.

“He learned that his friends have been dead many years, but he heard that they left a child, and he means to prosecute inquiries for that child at any cost, because he intends to make it the heir or heiress of all his wealth. So he begs Mr. Prodgers and myself to assist him all in our power to search for the child. I am going to write back to him, and I shall promise that I shall do all I can for him.”

The lady watches her hostess keenly as she speaks, and sees a wave of crimson sweep over the fair face, and receding again leaves two crimson spots in either cheek.

The large dark eyes are dilated to their widest extent, and she seems unable to breathe freely. Mrs. Prodgers is puzzled, but she feels sure of one thing—Lady Lyle must have known Mr. Stewart some time in the past, though her reminiscence of that individual does not seem to be of the pleasantest.

“Mr. Stewart begs us to give him an invite to Hazel Hollow, and ask us to let him know if the pretty place called 'The Willows' is to let. If so, would we negotiate with the landlord for him, and he will most gladly become our neighbour for an indefinite period. You are ill, dear Lady Lyle. What can I get for you?”

“Only a little water. I can get it.” Her voice seems lost, she speaks in a forced whisper; her lips are blue, her cheeks pallid. She moved towards a buffet, and poured out a glass of water. She did so that she might turn her back to Mrs. Prodgers more than for the sake of the water.

She rallied a little, and turning to her guest said, with a quaver in her voice:

“Let us go out and join the young people.”

Mrs. Prodgers, though not well posted in the ways of society, understood some of the human passions, that are alike in all grades; and she knew that her hostess had been terribly moved on hearing about Mr. Stewart, and that it was for the sake of hiding her poor wan face, and the misery in her eyes, under the projecting brim of her black lace hat, with its crown of flowers and foliage, that she proposed to go after the girls and Lord Lyle.

But the mistress of 'The Willows' was a tucky little woman, and all her pluck seemed to come back to her as she drew her lace hat over her face, and held it between her and her tormentor.

“Please don't judge me harshly, Mrs. Prodgers. You quite startled me when you spoke of Mr. Stewart. I knew a gentleman of that name before I was married. He wished to pay his addresses to me when my heart was already given to another—that other his friend; so we parted in anger, and I afterwards heard that George Stewart went out to the goldfields and became rich. But there may be many Mr. Stewarts, and this one may not be the person I knew long ago.”

“You call him George Stewart. The man who is coming from Paris signs his name George Stewart. And it does seem strange how he knows 'The Willows,' and wishes me to ask the present tenant to give him permission to go over it. He would like to do so for the sake of old times,” Mrs. Prodgers answers firmly.

Lady Lyle is passing through the open window, and the lower part of her side face is visible to her guest, who is walking behind her, and sees the pink flush suffuse the delicate skin.

“Whoever the gentleman is, he is quite welcome to go over the place when he comes,” she says, as she holds her hat well over her eyes.

There is an awkward silence.

“I was considering to-day whether I can run across to Paris and see the Exposition, as they call it. If I should meet Mr. Stewart there what a coincidence!” she says, with a short laugh that sounds very mirthless.

A peal of merry laughter and the light chatter of girls' voices guides the two women to where Sallie and Carrie are enjoying the good things Lord Lyle is saying for their amusement.

The young nobleman looks the very embodiment of drollery as, stretched at full length on a strip of green sward, he repeated droll anecdotes, or sung snatches of comic songs for the sisters, who, seated on a garden chair, are delighted to have a real, live lord to amuse them.

The swish of their mother's brocade skirts caused the young ladies to look round.

“Oh! I declare, here comes ma and Lady Lyle! Oh, ma! Lord Lyle has just given us an invite to join such a jolly party on board the 'Mermaid,' Mrs. Mellish's house-boat. You'll come, won't you, ma? You're included in the invitation, don't you know!” Carrie almost screamed in her wild excitement.

“What do you think? Won't we go? Why don't you keep cool, Carrie! You are so excitable!” Sallie says, in an aside to her sister.

“But ain't it scrumptious, eh—to see the regatta from a house-boat,” Carrie exclaims, with flashing eyes.

“You vulgar girl!” Sallie said, turning her head away with a gesture of contempt.

“How about yourself!” Carrie retorts. “Ma says you are more vulgar than I, Lord Lyle, is your ma going to the regatta?”

“I don't know. I am not sure, but I don't think so! Lady Lyle has declined Mrs. Mellish's invitation.”

“Now, girls, we must be going! We must not encroach on her ladyship's valuable time.”

Here Lady Lyle presented Mrs. Prodgers with a large bunch of fragrant roses and flowering shrubs, which she had been cutting while the young ladies had been parrying words and laughing at Lord Lyle.

“Oh, ma! There's Mrs. Mellish's brougham can't pass. Our victoria stop the way!” Carrie cries, harshly, as they moved towards their waiting carriage.

“I shall send Lady Lyle some of our fine strawberries, and Florrie Fashbrook shall take them!” Mrs. Prodgers said, as the victoria turns into the high road, and rolls along under the lime trees towards Hazel Hollow.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

“Jack, dear, will you amuse Mrs. Mellish just a few minutes while I bathe my face? That woman and her daughters have quite upset me.”

“What a kill-joy poor Mrs. Prodgers is, to be sure! Do you know that several people in this neighbourhood believe that I am one of the many strings Miss Carrie Prodgers has to her bow?”

Lady Lyle, though much excited, could not overcome her inclination to laugh at the idea of anybody suspecting Lord Lyle of being a suitor of Miss Carrie Prodgers.

Jack laughs gaily as he turns to greet the pretty, plump, stylish, laughing Mrs. Mellish.

Lady Lyle disappears behind what looks like a high wall of ivy, and taking off her lace hat, plunged into a thicket of laurel and myrtle, following a narrow path enclosed by overhanging boughs, leading out on a circular patch of green sward, in the centre of which is a large bed of mignonette, about ten feet square, enclosed by an iron railing.

A slender white marble shaft rises from the centre of the mignonette-bed.

The flowers grow tall and dense, and seem to have been well cared for. The marble shaft does not look as if it had been erected very recently, for the words, “In loving memory of my old dog, Lion,” were nearly obliterated by the rough weather to which it had been exposed.

Near the mignonette-bed is an arbour, where every kind of creeper known in England twined and twisted, and trailed into the dense mass that formed the roof. Near the arbour is an old fountain, whose water drips slowly, as if its source was nearly dried up.

Lady Lyle throws her hat on the grass, and, stepping forward, holds her hand out to catch the drip that issue from the open mouth of a hideous stone monster.

As the cold water touches her hand, she shrinks and shivers, as if she saw some dreadful sight.

Two or three times she caught a handful of water, and dashed the cold drops over her hot face, and dried it on her handkerchief; but two red spots remain on her cheeks that are not often seen there, and a strange glitter in her eyes that is quite unusual to them.

She turns towards the mignonette-bed, and, clutching the iron railing, bows her forehead upon it, as if suffering severe mental agony.

“Great Heaven! what is going to happen? George Stewart here!”

She stands immovable, with bowed head, for some minutes.

“When will he arrive? How am I to know? I must get away from 'The Willows' before he comes. Will he recognise me after all these years, and with this snow-white hair? He will know me. I was Lady Lyle then!”

“Here, mammy, darling, where are you?” cries the voice of Lord Lyle, as a crackling among the bushes announces his approach.

Lord Lyle dearly loved to tease his very youthful-looking stepmother by calling her mammy.

The lady straightens herself, and, with one hand still on the railing, turns her face towards where the voice comes from. There is a forced smile upon her lips.

“Ah! here you are, at the shrine of repentance, as usual! How many times a day do you make a pilgrimage to this mignonette-bed?”

“I love this old-fashioned garden, With its old fruit-laden trees, And its sheaves of great rose roses, Swinging in the summer breeze. I love the old gabled cottage, With its windows under the eaves, And that fair face in its setting, Of shimmering ivy leaves. Up from the new-mown meadows Comes a whiff of sweet hay to me, Where I am waiting for thee, Mignonette, Sweet Mignonette, for thee; Sweet Mignonette, Sweet Mignonette, Sweet Mignonette for thee!”

The young man sings in a clear, sweet falsetto, and seems to enjoy his own performance better than his hearer enjoys it.

“Why didn't you stay and keep Mrs. Mellish company?” Lady Lyle asks, presently, her stepson's intrusion at that moment being very distasteful.

“Because she won't have me. She says she is tired of men, and wants you. Mrs. Mellish is ransacking your flowers, and she'll turn all your curios over if you don't go in.”

“Oh, Jack, what a torment you are!” Lady Lyle says, as she picks up her hat and turns to go towards the house.

“What have I done, mammy, dear?” Jack calls after her, but, receiving no answer,

plunges into the thicket and throws himself at full length on the grass; while in the pretty drawing-room Lady Lyle is assuring her charming visitor how delighted she is to see her, and pretty, shallow Mrs. Mellish is going in raptures over the many beautiful things for which *The Willows* is famous.

"All presents from the dead and the absent!" the fair hostess explains, with a regretful sigh. Then the conversation drifted to the Henley Regatta.

"And you really cannot make time to spend a day or two with us on the house-boat, dear?" Mrs. Mellish pleads.

"I'm afraid not, dear. Business calls me to Paris shortly. I am not quite sure whether I go this week or not. If the Regatta comes off before I go, I shall be delighted to avail myself of your invitation, and visit your charming river residence."

"Thank you. And are you really going to Paris?"

"I expect so."

"We shall miss you greatly, dear! I have taken such a fancy to you that the Regatta, dearly as I love the water, will lose all interest and charm for me if you go away."

"What a flatterer you are, Mrs. Mellish!"

"Not at all, dear. You are so different from the people I meet every day. Your tastes are so different; you enjoy life so freely," Mrs. Mellish answers, gushingly.

"Well, I have drained the wine of life to the very dregs," Lady Lyle answers, as she leans back in her chair, letting her white lids and her long, dark lashes droop over her beautiful eyes.

"What a contrast between her brows and lashes and her long, white hair! What is the secret of this woman's life?" Mrs. Mellish thinks. Aloud, she says, with a smile that shows her pretty teeth—

"I do hope you will not go away before the Regatta! I shall be disappointed if you do."

"I have been altering a dress for the occasion. I have several handsome dresses since—before Lord Lyle's death, that require altering. I shall always wear black," she said, regretfully, "except on rare occasions—like the Regatta, when I sometimes lay it aside."

"Your ideas of dress are quite original. I suppose this one will be charmingly unique?"

"Ah, that is my secret!" Lady Lyle answers, with a meaning smile.

"Don't tell anybody, then!" Mrs. Mellish answers.

"What is this I hear about Hazel Hollow?"

"Oh, I have sent them an invite."

"Lord Lyle told me that he had persuaded you to invite them to the house-boat fête."

"Yes, Jack partly influenced me. Still, I cannot see how I could very well do otherwise. We are anchored so near their boat-house. I cannot imagine why Jack was so anxious to persuade me to ask them, or why he interests himself in them at all! I don't wonder at people thinking that he must be smitten with one of these girls. So absurd of him! Don't you think so?"

"There's a lot of men coming down—guardsmen and other fast fellows. Possibly Lord Lyle thinks that the Misses Prodgers will amuse his friends by their originality!"

"Eh bien, my dear! It is something to be rich. In England you are nothing unless you are rich. It is not everybody who has an uncle or a fairy godfather at the gold diggings."

"Well, no. The Hazel Hollow people have been very fortunate. They really had a fairy godfather."

"Well, ta-ta, dear; you must promise not to leave us before the Regatta."

Lady Lyle laughs softly, but does not give her valuable friend the desired promise as she follows her out to her carriage.

At parting they kiss and clasp each other's

hands fervently, as though they were the dearest friends on earth.

But the smile fades from Lady Lyle's face as she stands on the portico steps watching the receding brougham.

"I hate her—I hate her! She is always trying to look me through and through!"

And, with an evil expression upon her handsome face, she re-enters the house.

(*The conclusion of this interesting novella of love and adventure will appear next week.*)

#### WHAT IS THE SECRET?

What is the magical quality that makes one woman infinitely more fascinating than another, and draws the opposite sex in whatever sphere she moves, though she may be neither beautiful, witty nor talented? She might call it individuality, others might term it her personality, but it is really her attitude of mind. It is in those moments when a woman is most indifferent, most independent, most herself; it is when she is making least effort to be so that she is most attractive.

Some women are born with this calm indifference, this absolute independence that draws men as the magnet draws needles. It is when a woman is doing something and doing it well, and when her heart is elsewhere than on her sleeve, that she is most fascinating. It is not the fact that she can accomplish the thing, but that she is self-sufficient and does not need the attentions of men that makes her most attractive. A woman is most interesting when she is alone and absolutely herself. Directly a man appears she throws aside the work she is doing and strives to make herself attractive, thereby destroying much of the charm. She places herself in a receptive instead of an aggressive attitude, and begins to think he is about the only interesting item in her little life. A man quickly wearies of a woman whose only diversion is himself. He needs the impetus of rivalry. If other men follow her she becomes the better worth pursuing. On her side, the woman who strives too openly to please lacks that wonderful thing, poise and repose; she is invariably self-conscious, and is always considering what she will do and what she will say in order to appear most attractive.

When a woman is in love she is possibly more attractive than at any other time. The woman who in the usual course of things lacks charm, or at any rate that fascination which draws no lack of admirers to her feet, trebles her attractive powers when she loves and spends her life in loving, passionately and without reserve.

#### A MIGRANT'S MESSAGE

Canst thou not tarry  
To carry  
A message, dear Robin, for me?  
Just for a second—  
Full reckoned—  
The token I'm sending by thee!

Stay thy swift speeding!  
Unheeding  
The beauties that lie by the way;  
Nay, thou art checkless,  
And reckless  
Of orange bloom scenting the day.

Tropic confection  
Rejecting,  
Thou cleavest the azure afar,  
For thou art straining,  
And gaining  
Where cherry and apple blooms are!

Oh, please, as you wander  
Up yonder,  
To fair Daphne this message attune—  
That her lover is dreaming  
And scheming  
For a wedding-trip early in June!

#### Gems

MAN is only miserable so far as he thinks himself so.

SOME folks smile—and then their face flicks back like a spring lock.

HEALTH is the second blessing that we mortals are capable of; a blessing that money cannot buy.

DELIBERATE with caution, but act with decision; yield with graciousness, but oppose with firmness.

ALL the acts of a man inscribe themselves in the memories of his fellows, and in his own manners and face.

IF you would hit the target, aim a little above it. Every arrow that flies feels the attraction of earth.

OUR business undoubtedly is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.

AS in the smallest fountain is seen the reflected heavens, so on the humblest life we may see the mirror Christ.

THE better you are the better you ought to be, especially in charity to those who are without thy protecting influence of good.

EVIL thoughts are keys that unlock the door of the heart to evil ways, and noble thoughts are wings that bear us to nobler deeds.

THOSE who disbelieve in virtue, because man has never been found perfect, might as reasonably deny the sun because it is not always noon.

#### THE VOICES OF ANIMALS.

IT does not seem possible that we shall ever be able to comprehend the language of animals, but it is interesting to note the variety of their voices.

IN the mammal the general structure of the larynx is like that of man, the power and character of the sound depending on the different degrees of development of the vocal chords, and the peculiarity of structure of the vocal organs. The timbre, or quality, of the voice is remarkably distinct in the different classes of animals, and also varies in those of the same class. Lions and tigers, with their magnitude of chest, make a roar that fills the ear with a sense of horror, the depth of voice giving to the mind the idea of an enormous being.

THE horse neighs in a descent on the chromatic scale without even omitting a semi-tone, being one of the most musically voiced of animals.

THE ass brays in a perfect octave, and one of its ejaculations has been copied by Haydn in his seventy-sixth quartet with great success.

THE bark of the dog is an instance of a voice acquired by domestication, much as the trotting of a horse is an acquired movement.

AN ape produces an exact octave of musical sounds, ascending and descending the scales by half tones, so that perhaps it alone of brute animals may be said to sing.

THE howling, or preaching, monkey of South America has a voice that can be heard for two miles.

THE giraffe and the armadillo are voiceless, with no vocal chords.

THE chirp of the long-eared bat is said to be the most acute sound produced by any animal, and only five out of six persons can hear it.

IN reptiles the larynx is in a rudimentary condition.

THE crocodiles and caimans make a feeble, roaring sound.

ONE kind of frog has a sound-bag, evidently acting as a resonance chamber, on each side of its mouth.

THE tortoise give a mere snuffling sound.

SNAKES have no vocal chords, but produce a hissing, by expulsion of air through the narrow opening of the glottis.

Most fishes are mute.

## Facetiae

PRUDENCE is the mother of good luck, and  
success is the grandchild.

PARADOXICAL but true: When a carpenter goes on a strike he doesn't use his hammer.

Some men would think they were cheated if they had the mumps lighter than their neighbours.

The man who couldn't fill the office better than the man appointed has yet to be born in a great republic.

"Is he really your rival?" "Yes." "Great Scott! If I had a rival that looked like that, do you know what I would do?" "No." "I'd give up the girl."

"My luck," exclaimed an out-at-heels gentleman, "is so atrociously bad that I believe if I were to invest in some soap, washing would go out of fashion to-morrow."

Don't ask the returned vacationist how many fish he caught. It is wrong to encourage falsification, and you know you wouldn't believe him, no matter what he said.

MAMMA (examining the proof of her little daughter's photograph): "Gracie, why didn't you smile?" Gracie (six years old, with an injured air): "I did, mamma; but the man didn't put it down."

MR. BUMPTIOUS: "Oh, I like to sit by you, Miss Bell." Miss Bell (who is exclusive): "And as do I." Mr. Bumptious (puzzled for the moment): "But—er—how's that?" Miss Bell: "I like to sit by myself."

"I AM very old," said the veteran, "and I have seen many a fight." "Did you bear arms in eighteen hundred and thirty?" asked the boy. "No, my boy," returned the old man; "it was just the other way. Arms bore me."

SOMEbody gave little Augustus two toys. "I will give this one to my dear little sister," he said, showing the largest. "Because it is the prettiest," said his delighted mamma. "No," he replied, without hesitation, "because it's broken."

"I STOOD on the corner during that wind and laughed and laughed to see hats blown off and umbrellas turned inside out," said Binks. "In fact, I should have been there laughing yet if my own hat had not gone when my umbrella was turned inside out. Then I swore."

"Ice," mused the simple fellow, spelling out the word on a window of the restaurant, "that's ice—On, that's on, of course, parle. Oh, that's talk, and, of course, the other word's French. French talk on ice! Wish I understood it—always heard it was pretty warm."

LITTLE JOHNNY: "That young man who comes to see you must be pretty poor company. He hasn't any sense of humour." Sister: "Why do you think so?" Little Johnny: "I told him all about the funny way you get up and bang the doors when you get in a fit of a temper, and he didn't laugh a bit."

SIR: "Did you get my love letter this morning?" He: "Yes; but when the postman told me he had a letter for me I thought it was from Jack Borroughs." She: "You did not expect to hear from me, did you?" He: "No, and Jack promised to send me a dollar he owed me. I tell you I was mad for a minute or two."

"BACK! BACK!" shouted Castro, as the dauntless little army of foreigners attempted to disembark. In the offing the forms of the warships of the different nations loomed ominously. "You cannot land," declared the doughty South American. "I wish it distinctly understood that I retain all dramatic and historical rights in this incident." Baffled, the army of writers, rowing moodily back to their despatch boats, threatened all sorts of diplomatic vengeance.

FARMER TURNIPS: "I heard that your son in Australia was coining money." Farmer Hayes: "He was, until the police got too sharp for him."

"WHAT a remarkable violinist, and only eight years old!" Mr. Bloke: "Very remarkable, indeed. The little girl has improved greatly since I heard her twelve years ago."

MRS. MALAPRO sometimes hits the nail on the head. It rained in torrents as she left church on Sunday morning without an umbrella. "How irrigating this is!" she cried.

"Ah, John," she said, just before the marriage. "I fear I'm not worthy of you. You are such a good man." "Never mind that, Martha, I'll change all that after the wedding."

THE FIRST thing a man does on reaching the rural regions is to loudly rhapsodise over the beauty and purity of untrammelled Nature. The next is to start back to town, "where there is some fun going on."

BOARDER (heatedly to landlady): "Madam, I have just found one of the blackest of hairs in my soup. This is outrageous!" Landlady (snappishly): "Oh, outrageous, is it? Well, if you think I'm going to hire a red-headed cook just to suit your taste you're mistaken."

"I DIDN'T know yo' could read, Bre'r Downey." Downey (apparently much interested in his paper): "Oh, yes, I'se read eber since I wuz er boy." "Den how comes it dat you'se readin' dat paper upside down?" "I always reads dat way, Bre'r Downey, den I'se get at de bottom of de facts without habing ter read down de whole column."

THE AMERICAN had just told the Englishman a joke. The latter did not laugh. "I suppose," said the American, sarcastically, "that you will see the point of that joke about the day after to-morrow, and laugh then." "My dear boy," drawled the Englishman, "I saw the point of that joke and laughed at it four years ago when I was in India."

FOGGES: "There's nothing so delicious in the world as to reach out of bed in the morning to ring for your valet to come and dress you." Brown: "Have you a valet?" Fogg: "No, but I have a bell." Brown: "But what good does it do you to ring it? No valet will come in response." Fogg: "That's just the most delectable part of it. As the valet doesn't come, you don't have to get up."

GRIFFIN called the other day on the girl that refused him last, taking with him a selection of buttonless shirts, and so forth. "Whatever are these for, Mr. Griffin?" asked the dame. "Why," said Griffin, "you promised you'd be a sister to me, and my sisters always mend my things for me, don't you know?" But she didn't know, and she told Griffin so; and now he's putting it about everywhere that she didn't fulfil her contract.

"WELL, Penn," said Hannibal, surveying the room critically, "you have mighty snug quarters here for a bachelor. I must say—books, papers, photographs of pretty girls—stunners, too. Hello! here's a scrap-book!" (Examines, and turns to Penn with a look of disgust.) "Oh, I say, it can't be possible that you laugh at these so-called humorous paragraphs?" "Excuse me," replied Penn, coldly. "You are unjust. I write them. I do not read them."

FARMER (to medical man): "If you get out my way, doctor, any time, I wish you'd stop and see my wife. She says she ain't feeling well." Physician: "What are some of her symptoms?" Farmer: "I dunno. This morning, after she had milked the cows, and fed the pigs, and got breakfast for the labourers, and washed the dishes, and built a fire under the copper in the wash-house, and done a few odd jobs about the house, she complained of feeling tired-like. I shouldn't be surprised if her blood was out of order. I fancy she needs a dose of medicine."

MRS. FLANAGAN: "I want a pair of shoes for my boy." Salesman: "French kid, ma'am?" "No, sir, Irish kid."

"HASN'T that big, lazy boy of yours got a regular position yet?" "Oh, yes, indeed." "What is it?" "Recumbent."

HUSBAND: "Where do you want to go?" Wife: "Oh, I don't know—anywhere where I can spend money." "But I thought you wanted a change?"

THERE was a sculptor named Phidias, Whose statues were perfectly hideous. He made Aphrodite. Without any nightie, And so shocked the ultra-fastidious.

YESTERDAY: "Why does that fellow walk on the railway?" The train might come along and kill him." Crimsonbeak: "Yes; but I suppose the poor fellow is afraid of the automobiles."

JUDY: "Will ye give me yer promise, Dennis, that ye'll love me forever?" Dennis: "Sure, an' Oi'd like to do that same, Judy, but Oi'm hardly of the opinion that Oi'll last as long as that."

"DEAH boy, is it true that you have discharged your valet?" "Ya-as, the dosid scoundrel was too dom'd fresh! When I took him out with me he managed to make people think he was the mastah and I was the man, baw Jove!"

"IT'S a fact, Aunt Kate," said the young man. "Father says he will pay my way through college, but after that I'll have to stand on my own merit." "Let us hope it will not be so bad as that, Rodney," soothingly replied his elderly relative.

AN OLD man was on the witness stand, and was being cross-examined by the lawyer. "You say you are a doctor?" "Yes, sir, yes, sir." "What kind of a doctor?" "I make intment, sir." "And what is your ointment good for?" "It's good to rub on the head to strengthen the mind." "Oh! what effect would it have if you were to rub some of it on my head?" "None at all, sir. We must have something to start with."

SCHOOL IN 1950.—Teacher (to a newly-arrived pupil): "Have you your vaccination certificate with you?" "Yes, sir." "Have you been vaccinated with the cholera bacillus?" "Yes, sir." "Have you a written certificate that you have been made immune from whooping cough, measles, and scarlatina?" "Yes, sir." "Will you promise never to use the sponge and slate pencil of your neighbour?" "Yes, sir." "Are you willing that at least once every week all your books be thoroughly fumigated with sulphur and your clothes be disinfected with mercuric bichloride?" "Yes, sir." "Very well, then, as you possess all the necessary protective measures prescribed by our modern hygienic requirements you may mount over that wire enclosure and take yonder isolated aluminium seat and may begin your lessons."

NOT AN IMPROBABLE STORY.—"What's the matter, old man?" he said, as they met the morning after. "You look blue." "I feel blue." "But last night you were the jolliest of the party!" "I felt jolly." "You acted like a boy just let out of school." "I felt like one." "You said your wife had gone away for the first time for three years, and there wasn't any one to say a word if you went home and kicked over the mantel clock." "I remember it." "You said that if you stayed out until four o'clock there was no one to look at you reproachfully and sigh and make you feel mean." "Yes, and I stayed out until four o'clock, didn't I?" "You certainly did." "And I gave an Indian war whoop on the doorstep." "Yes, and you sang a verse from a comic opera song, and you tried to dance a clog." "And my wife had missed the train. Now go away and leave me."

# KIT

By EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS

Author of "Unseen Fires," "Woman Against Woman," "Her Mistake, etc., etc.

## CHAPTER XI.

"ATE, come here!"

Sybil Leith was sitting at her writing-table, ostensibly engaged in some letters, but, for the last ten minutes, she had been giving the whole of her attention to the girl's figure sitting by the window, with a heap of soft muslin on her lap, which she was framing into some dainty figures and bows.

Kit looked round with a start; she had been lost in thought. She rose immediately, just a tiny flush on her cheek.

"Yes, Miss Sybil," she said, standing obediently by the table.

"Kate," Sybil Leith said, meditatively, "do you know you are a very mysterious person? You have been sitting in that chair for the last hour, and you have been smiling to yourself all the time."

"Have I?" Kit said, hurriedly, the colour deepening in her cheeks.

"You have most certainly," Sybil nodded her head. "Now, I am curious. I want to know what nice thoughts you had to make you smile so happily."

Kit was silent an instant.

"I did not know I was smiling," she answered, a little hurriedly; "and—and I don't remember my thoughts. I must have been dreaming; I have days of dreams sometimes."

"They must be very sweet and pretty, then," Sybil said, smiling as she spoke. "What a shame to disturb you; but, after all, I do want to speak to you, so I should have had to wake you up. Kate, how would you like to leave me?"

Kit put out her hand with a gesture that was as honest as it was involuntary.

"Oh, why do you say such a thing?" she said, her voice surprised and alarmed.

Sybil put out her hand.

"Dear Kate," she said, gently, "it does sound an unkind thing, but—" She paused, and Kit stood, saying nothing.

"I am thinking of your future, dear," Sybil said, when she spoke. "You see, I have grown so fond of you, Kate, and I want to take care of you as much as I can, and know you are happy and in a good home, and—." Sybil paused again. "And, perhaps," she said, with a shy blush, "I—I shall not always be here, you see, Kate, and—."

Kit did not quite understand. All she knew was that the smile had gone from her lips and out of her heart.

This mere idea, this bare suggestion of her leaving Sybil Leith, was fraught with a sudden and bitter pain. Not only because of the pleasure her young mistress's companionship gave her, but for another reason. Kit's eyes went in dreamy thought to the picture of a garden at night—trees waving dark shadows in the moonlight; beyond and around, outside the iron railings, the sound and hum of a busy world, bat, inside, a paradise of peace, of joy, of sympathy illimitable.

To go away she must leave all this. There must be an end to those exquisite moments, an end to the hazy day-dreams that followed on them.

A week had gone since that memorable evening when he had first followed her. What a week! To the girl's imaginative mind it was a week filled to the brim with every sort of poetical and ideal happiness. Thoughts, views, had been brought before her of which she, in her youth and ignorance, had never dreamed; life, that had been so sad, so drear, so desolate, now stretched before her as some glorious picture that dazzled her eyes and made her heart thrill.

She had seen him every night; they sat and talked. He had talked, and she had lis-

tened, and then he had her shy soul from her lips, and he had made her open her heart and speak as she had never spoken before, giving utterance to those thoughts that had been wont to come into her face and mystify poor Chris, being so far above him in every way.

Kit could not have remembered exactly what had been said between them. She only knew that she lived through each day only for the evening to come when she could meet him again.

He was like some strange knight of old, eager to range himself on the side of the weak and troubled; he was so handsome, so gentle, so tender, and then he loved her. Had he not said it only last night, as they stood hand-in-hand just before they parted? He had called her queen—a queen with star-like eyes; and then he had bent his head and kissed the little hands he held, just as some courtier would kiss the hand of his sovereign.

She had sat there alone long after he had gone, and she had held the hands he had kissed again and again to her lips, while her heart thrilled with the joy that dwelt within it.

She was content, she was happy—happy and content in absolute innocence and ignorance. She did not even know his name; she knew nothing of his life; she knew no more than she learnt in those brief moments he spent with her under the trees, wooing the very soul of her soul from her by his tender voice and sweet, soft words. And now—now Sybil was speaking to her of leaving, of going away!

Kit was awakened from her dreams as roughly as though some hand had thrown cold water upon her.

She was bewildered for the moment; she could not arrange her thoughts, she could do nothing but stand silent and dismayed.

Sybil Leith seemed to find nothing strange in the girl's manner. She, too, had her mind full of thought—thought that was confusing when mixed with mundane matters. She wanted to say a good deal to Kit, but she found it a difficult matter to speak out all she had to say.

She tapped her pen on her blotting-pad, and lapsed into her thoughts, until she woke with a start to find Kit still standing waiting for her to speak.

"You must know, Kate," she said, hurriedly, "that I don't want to lose you; but," she began to shake herself free of those bewildering, confusing thoughts, "but, as I said just now, I want to be your true friend, and put selfishness all on one side. You have been with me very little more than a fortnight, Kate, but it has been time enough to learn what you really are. I am convinced you are not fit to be a servant to me or to anyone. You are, in fact, my equal. Your birth is as gentle as mine. You have betrayed this fact in a thousand ways that have spoken to me far more than words!"

The two girls were clasping hands now. Kit found her lips would not speak the words she longed to utter.

"This being so, dear friend," Sybil went on, hurriedly, "you can understand how eager I am to help you to a life more suited to you altogether—one in which you can find independence without humiliation. If—if things were going on with me as they have gone, I would never suggest a change; but," Sybil stopped, with a blush, "things are not going to be just as they have been. I will tell you of that directly. All I want to say to you now is to tell you I have found the very home for you—at least, I am sure you will like it. I have thought a great deal about you, Kate, lately, and two or three nights ago I spoke to

an old and very dear friend, the sort of man whom I knew would be able to help me in what I wanted; and just fancy, Kate, sooner had I said I wanted to find a pleasant home for a girl friend of mine than Sir Philip immediately declared he had been trying to find someone exactly like you to live with his cousin, a dear old lady whom I know very well, and of whom I am very fond, and then—"Sybil was full of her story, and had not noticed that Kit's hand had stolen away from that firm hold, and was hanging straight by her side—"and then I told Sir Philip I would have a little chat with you, and then write him what you said:

"It would be a very pleasant life, I think. Kate; you would have very little to do. Lady Milborough really wants a companion to sit with her, drive with her, go to music with her, and be genial and interesting. She would give you fifty pounds a-year, and you could go at once; but if you would rather not leave me for a little while—well, I daresay we could manage to arrange all that."

Sybil finished with a smile.

Kit tried to condense her thoughts, to be and seem quite at her ease. Poor child! the lesson of dissimulation was something she had never had reason to study. She felt all at once as though some great change were coming upon her.

She possessed, as has been said, a nature that was sensitive to the highest degree, highly-strung with a nervous organisation that was capable of enduring much and suffering intensely.

The influence of the last week had been to cloud all these faculties, but now, brought face to face with something definite, something that demanded action, not thought, her whole nature was roused. She did not quite know what to do, what to say, for the moment. Sybil misread her hesitation.

"I see," she said, gently, "I have startled you. You want to think quietly over what I have said, and perhaps, when you know my news, Kate, it may help you in your decision."

Sybil laughed very softly; then, with a glance at the photograph that stood before her, she seemed to gain courage.

"Kate," she said, and her face grew almost beautiful in this moment, "I want you to be very glad, for—for I am very, very happy. I am going to be married, Kate, and I love him with all my heart and soul!"

Kit lost all her own discomfort immediately; her face lighted up at once. Ah! could she not understand such words!

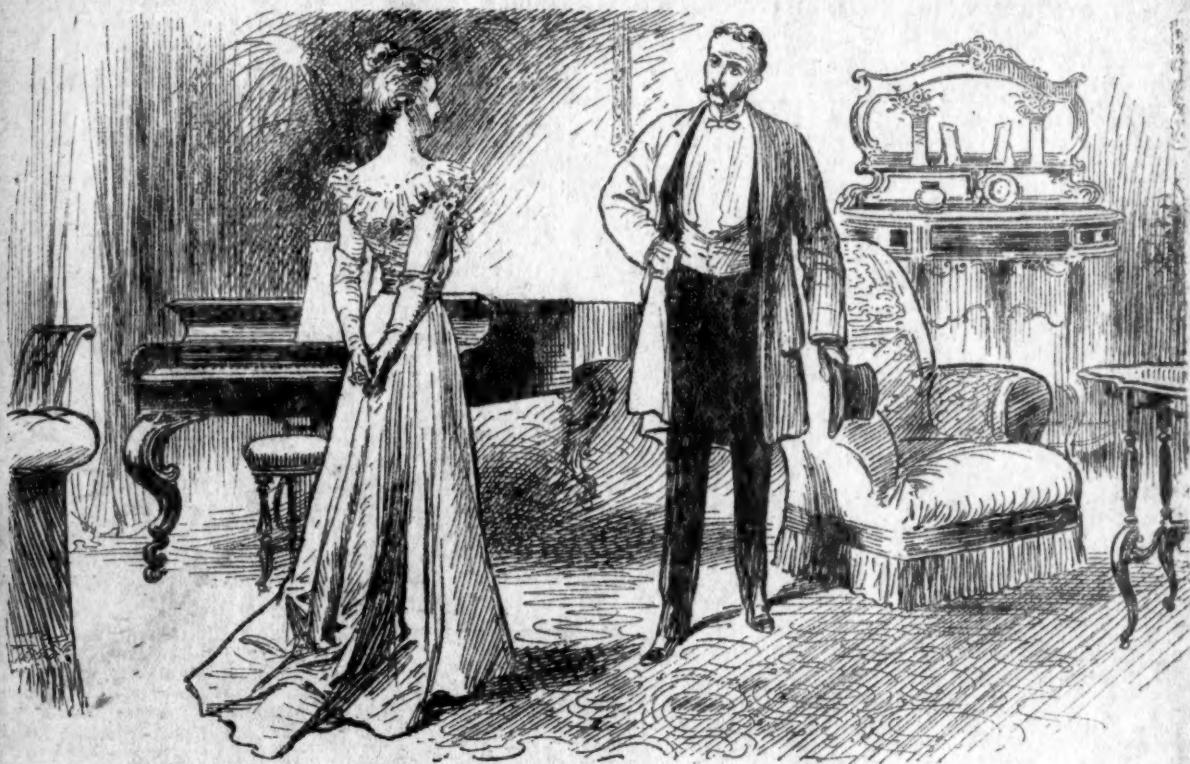
"Oh! I am glad, so glad!" she said, and her voice was eloquent with this fact. "You know I am glad," she said, coming a little nearer to Sybil.

The other girl took Kit's hand, and held it tightly, leaning her cheek on it.

"I—I have not told you anything about it, Kate, because I was not quite sure. I thought it, you know, but all was unsettled—it was only last night; and, oh, Kate! Kate! I don't know how I came home. I am sure mamma must have thought me mad; I danced upstairs three at a time. I longed to be alone to think. You will know just how I felt some day, little Kate, when the same thing comes to you, and you learn what it is to love someone as I love my Maurice!"

Kit bent down involuntarily and kissed the lips of the flushed speaker. Equality had been utterly established between them now; they were friends—friends in the truest, closest sense, and something that spoke in both their hearts, though it found no vent in their words, linked them together closer today than they had ever been before.

"Shall I tell you all about it, Kate?" Sybil rose from her chair, and, twisting her arms about Kit's waist, walked with her to the window. "It was at the Duchess's ball. You know now why I wanted to look my very best—but I always want that when I know I am going to see him. We did not dance. He cannot dance just now; he is lame."



MAURICE MONTGOMERY RETURNED TO SYBIL WITH A NEW LIE ON HIS LIPS AND ANGER IN HIS HEART.

Kit gave a little start, and Sybil hastened to reassure her. "Oh! not a cripple; he is only lame for the moment. He hurt his leg three years ago when he was so brave, and was such a hero out in that horrible Africa, and, of course, it is never very strong, so that he has to be very careful. The least thing makes it bad. That is why he is lame now; he had a slight accident the other day—I don't quite know what it was; but, at any rate, he is better now, and when—when he belongs to me, I shall be very strict with him, and see that he takes care of himself, as he ought to do. When he belongs to me!" Sybil repeats, laying her head on Kit's shoulder, and lapsing for a moment into happy dream thoughts. "How sweet it sounds! You must like my Maurice. Kate, you must promise to like him; he is so handsome, such an honest, noble face!"

Kit said nothing; she was trembling a little—why she could not have told. She felt as one feels when some danger is imminent, a danger one knows but cannot avoid. She was conscious of a cold sensation that was something she had never experienced before. She clung a little closer to Sybil; the contact of this happy, sympathetic creature did her good. Still, all was confused, uncertain, and strange in her; she was like one in a dream, and yet she lived acutely. Sybil spoke on softly, telling her little love-story in a delicate, shy way.

"And now you see, Kate, dear, why I am so anxious to do something for you, for I shall be married so soon. He—he says he cannot wait longer than August, and I am glad to do all he wants, and I should be so happy and glad if I could know you would be in some home. You will think over all I have said. Lady Milborough is a sweet old woman, and when you see Sir Philip you will adore him; he is one of the best men in the world. Remember, dear, if you would like to stay with me until—until I go, why—"

Kit found her voice.

"Yes, yes; let me stay a little longer. You know I will do all you say—how could I refuse you? You have been my first friend, my angel friend, but I want to be with you a little longer—if I may!"

Sybil was deeply touched.

"And so you shall, dear," she answered, kissing the delicate face beside her, "so you shall—not as my maid, but as my little companion and my friend. Only, Kate," with a shy laugh, "you must promise not to be too much bored with me, for I expect you will hear nothing but Maurice, Maurice, Maurice all day long."

Kit laughed, but her mind was still full of this vague premonition of trouble, and for the first time a sort of thought touched her that perhaps this wonderful happiness, which had come so unexpectedly, and which she was cherishing so dearly, was something that should not have been. She scarcely knew in this moment what to think, how to sort and frame the ideas that were crowding her brain.

Sybil talked on. All was so wonderful, so beautiful to her, and Kit understood so well and was so full of sympathy. She knew no one to whom she could have spoken all this as well as to Kit.

"So that is settled. I will write to Lady Milborough myself, and to-morrow we will drive and see her. I am sure to have a spare hour," this with her ready blush, "and I shall introduce you as my dear friend whom I have known only a short time, yet whom I love already as though I had known you years—do I not trust you with my most precious secrets? I know you will guard them, and some day, perhaps, you will have your secrets to tell me—and then—" Sybil kissed Kit again, and then danced back to her writing-table. "How lazy I am; I can do nothing to-day, and I must finish these letters!"

She took up her pen, while Kit stood rooted to the ground; a pang of pain and remorse

had suddenly seized her—Sybil's innocent, laughing words had all at once stabbed her. Had she not already a secret which she did not share—which she must not share, for he had said she must be silent? He had not wanted anyone but their two selves to enter their dream world—for a time, at least.

"Let us live apart and out of the world, we two, little one," he had said; "what do we want with others? They will only spoil our happiness; they will not understand our thoughts and dreams!"

And she had agreed to all he said, for every word he uttered had a separate beauty and significance to her. She had not questioned or tried to ponder on his meaning. To her it was only that he spoke poems that harmonised with the silver moonlight and the soft summer night breeze; but now the poetry was gone, and she knew, looking at facts with her great, true, honest heart, that there was a jarring note in the melody that had lived in her ears through the past week, a dark, small cloud on the brilliancy of her horizon. If Sybil could give her such unlimited confidence, ought not she, in return—she who owed so much to this gentle, sweet-natured girl—ought not she to make her confidence, to speak out her story, too?

She stood there, troubled, restless; the peace broken, the dream dispelled.

Sybil looked up from her writing.

"Go and put on your hat, Kate. We will go out together, you and I. I must just run to mamma for a moment; I have forgotten an address I want. We will go and sit in the Square. He—he is not coming till late this afternoon." She was moving away when a sudden thought came to her. "See—here is his picture. No, don't look at it until I am gone. It has always stood there, but I don't think you have ever noticed it. You understand now, Kate, why I always like to dust this table myself. I shall be back—directly. Study him well," Sybil put her head round

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the door, "and then tell me if you don't think him the most beautiful man in all the world."

Kit sent her a smile, and with a wave of her hand Sybil Leith disappeared.

Left to herself, Kit stood and gave way for a moment to this confused trouble of thought that burdened her. She held the picture Sybil had given her listlessly in her hand.

All at once it came to her with a sort of weariness that there were worse things to meet with in the world than a bitter tongue and dependence.

She had suffered much and often when she had been beneath her aunt's roof; still, there had been something in the life which seemed to her now to be gone from her for ever—a joyousness, a delight in mere existence which had beautified everything.

The new, sweet happiness of the past week had been of a different sort, something potent, dreamy, subtle, not invigorating, and then it was broken already.

She felt she was untrue to Sybil, and that was horrible to her. She felt she had done something wrong, though how, why, or in what way she could not define. She only knew she was troubled and confused, and that even the joy that she had been counting on in the evening had diminished till it seemed feeble and poor.

She gave a sigh. Events had crowded upon her so quickly, and her young life had been wont to run in so simple a fashion, never changing, never growing less or bigger, that she felt herself overwhelmed by circumstances.

Of only one thing she felt certain in this moment of conflicting emotions and thoughts, and that was her great delight in Sybil's happiness. She had responded to the friendship and sympathy offered to her as a flower smiles under the influence of the sun. As long as life ran in her veins she would never cease to remember all that Sybil had given her, all that she had received from the more fortunate girl's hands.

She brushed her hair back from her hot brow, and gave a deep, involuntary sigh. The strange presence of evil and sorrow was heavy upon her.

It must have been this alone that sustained her as she at last bent her head to gaze upon the picture she held in her hand, this alone that gave her strength to let her eyes rest on the face of the man who had woven such a dream of words and thoughts into her life during the past week—the false, handsome fellow who had won the heart from her heart, while he was uttering the same false vows to the girl who was to be his wife, the girl who was now her best and dearest friend!

When Sybil Leith re-entered her room she found her lover's portrait replaced on the table, and Kit gone; and there was no sign—nothing to tell her that the little tragedy of a girl's broken heart and faith had been enacted there during her absence.

#### CHAPTER XII.

Sybil and Kit did not meet again until the next day. Lady Grace's maid waited on Miss Leith, and announced, in tones of subdued indignation, that Lowe was ill with a headache, and had gone to bed.

Sybil was full of sympathy.

"I thought she looked very pale this morning," she said, and then, still further increasing the maid's indignation, she insisted on going up the stairs to Kit's room, only to find the door locked, and to receive no answer to her gentle tap on the panel.

She waited a few moments; then, thinking Kit was in all probability fast asleep, she stole downstairs again, feeling sad for the moment in the midst of her happiness.

The sadness gave way, however, to a blush and smile as her lover was announced and entered the room, followed by Sir Philip Desmond, who, as Maurice Montgomery's old friend and so distant guardian, came at once

to do homage to the girl who was to become the young man's wife.

Philip Desmond was, in truth, only too delighted with such an errand. He had known Sybil well for some time, and liked her extremely.

His congratulations rang with sincerity. The influence of a pure, sweet woman such as Sybil was the one thing in all the world to work absolute good in Maurice, for, deeply as he liked him, there were many things in the young man which jarred on and pained the elder considerably.

Sir George and Lady Grace had, strange to relate, given a hearty consent to the engagement and speedy marriage. Strange in the sense that Captain Montgomery was a poor man, and the god of the Leiths was money; but Maurice had exercised his power of fascination over Lady Grace to a most wonderful degree, and so the course of the young people's love was made very smooth for them in consequence.

It was a small family dinner, in which Philip had been included at Maurice's particular wish.

Looking very closely at Captain Montgomery, it might have been remarked that his habitual self-satisfied expression was absent from his handsome face, and that there was a restlessness, a hurried sort of eagerness, in his eyes which did not accord exactly with the contentment that his present success should have most certainly produced. He laughed and chatted with as much apparent ease as ever; but to a most discriminating eye and ear it would have been easy to see that his gaiety and ease were by no means as natural as they might have been. Fortunately for him, there was no such eye and ear present. He sat beside Sybil, who was too happy to realise anything except his presence, and Sir Philip had to give his closest and most earnest attention to Lady Grace's conversation, which was usually of a most engrossing and wearisome description.

After dinner, Maurice did not remain to smoke with Sir Philip and his future father-in-law; he made his way to the drawing-room, and Sybil welcomed him with a tender smile and another deep blush.

He drew her into the conservatory, out of sight of Lady Grace's head, and there, behind the big palms and amid the rich mass of flowers, he put his arm about her and kissed her, saying some soft words which came to his lips so fluently and meant so little. All at once he gave a start.

"I am the most remiss of men!" he said. "Imagine that I should, after all, have forgotten it, when it has occupied my thoughts all day!"

"Forgotten what, dear?" Sybil said, nestling close to him.

He kissed her again.

"Something I am going to give you—a tiny, humble pledge of my affection for you. I will go and get it at once!"

Sybil held him back.

"There is no need, darling. I have you; I do not want your present now!"

He laughed.

"Ahh! but I want you to have it, my dear little Sybil. I put it out on my table on purpose to bring it to you to-night, and I cannot disappoint myself. You must have it. I will be only a few minutes—a quarter of an hour at the most. It is horrible to tear myself away even for that short time, but it is my punishment for being so forgetful!"

He kissed her lips, which wore a slightly wistful look. She would far rather he had stayed beside her here in this soft light, with the scent of the flowers about them, and the big palms casting faint shadows over their heads.

There was no jewel in the world could give her such delight as to be with him, to let her hands lie in his as they sat and whispered of their future. She was, however, absolutely unselfish in her love, and as she saw his de-

sired to do this, she, of course, put her own wishes on one side.

"You will be very quick?" she said, with her pretty smile; "really, very, very quick!"

"I shall fly!" Maurice answered, lightly; and then he put his arm about her, and whispered something tender and beautiful which was as false as it was sweet.

He waved his hand to her as they parted, and walked as hurriedly as he could into the hall.

"A hansom," he said to the butler. "I am going to fetch something I have forgotten, tell Sir Philip when he comes out."

He got into the cab and was driven away from the big house. He had not gone a hundred yards before he put up his stick and stopped the cab, paid the man, and dismissed him; then, crossing the road, he skirted round the gardens that stood in the centre of the square. The night was moonless, and his figure was not noticeable in the twilight.

As he neared one of the gates, he pushed it eagerly, and then he swore under his breath, the gate was locked.

A whole story of what had happened was revealed to him in that fact. As though it had been proclaimed to him by some loud voice, he knew he should never see Kit again as he had seen her during the past week. He pushed his hat over his brows and paced to and fro slowly, keeping his eyes fixed on the house he had just left, in case a slender, black-robed figure should come from it. While he waited, a clock somewhere near struck ten in clear, silvery tones.

It was the hour at which he had always found her. He peered through the railings. Perhaps she had closed the gate by mistake; but even while he looked he knew she was not there, would never be there any more.

He cursed himself and his luck as he walked on. He had of late cultivated a vague intention of marrying Sybil Leith, but he had nothing definite in his mind, and it certainly was not for the moment—more particularly at this especial moment, when the poor man thing he called his heart was all engrossed with another being who could never be his wife, of course, but who was none the more or less desirable on that account.

He had begun his adventure with Kit from vanity, and from an honest admiration of her unusual beauty.

The girl's absolute innocence was an attraction—the contact with her strange, poetical nature something new. He liked to sit and listen to her dreamy thoughts, and watch the varied expression lit across her pale face. He loved to bring the changes into her marvellous eyes, and there was a novel amusement in playing at being a dreamer like herself, and following the drift of her thoughts.

He was so clever he could wind the girl which way he liked, and, this being so, it had been easy to impress her with his desire for secrecy, where another and maybe a younger girl would have hesitated.

Kit, secure in the armour of her absolute innocence, had seen no wrong in anything. He had had no definite scheme concerning her at first, but as each day went the girl's fascination grew and grew.

Her beautiful young love, given so frankly, was something delightful.

Maurice was the ordinary young man of his time—a sophist and an egotist. To his mind he would be conferring a benefit on Kit by taking her out of so uncongenial a sphere as that in which fate had thrust her, and constituting himself her protector and friend.

She was most certainly alone in the world, discarded for some reason by her kith and kin. Why should she not turn to him, whom she had learned to love so well, and find all she lacked in his care.

This had been his argument and his thought, and only a few short hours before had been his determination.

He had been very guarded and careful in his actions with the girl; he had done nothing to

alarm her or to awake her in the faintest degree from the dreamland in which she lived. He meant to bring her to his will by the most delicate means. She should be given some dainty little home in the country which she loved; she should reign as a queen in this little household, and he would be her king, her all!

Only the night before, as he had driven away from her, he had planned everything out carefully.

He must get her away from the Leiths as quickly as possible, before the sympathy and interest Sybil had expressed for her should have developed into a confidential friendship.

He knew that no word concerning him could have passed between the two girls, and he intended that none should.

Kit should go away quietly, without a word, leaving no trace behind her (she would obey him in all), and while he held her in his possession, secure from all the world's interference or questioning, he would leisurely consume his way with the girl whose money was the chief object of his desire.

All this had been not only possible, but well-nigh certain the night before. Now the scheme had vanished into thin air.

Even now he could not well have told how it had come to pass that the fatal words had been spoken to Sybil. He had been flirting with her, as usual, indulging in his fashion of making pretty speeches which had a tender sound but no real meaning.

For once he overstepped his caution. Sometimes he hardly remembered what was said, and before he could well realise it he found himself the accepted lover of Sybil Leith.

He was furious with himself—furious beyond measure—for more than one reason. He had no desire to be married just yet, and the thought of Kit was nothing less than a passion with him.

He had spent the night hours wondering what he had better do, imagining all that would happen.

If he had only prepared the way better he might even then have brought Kit away from her present home, and have got her safely from London deep in some unknown country spot; but he had a very delicate, difficult task to accomplish all this, and, in the meantime, it was almost a foregone conclusion that Sybil would speak of her engagement, and the whole thing would be at an end with Kit.

He did not quite know how she would act. She was so young, so ignorant of the world and its ways, she might be capable of doing anything.

Would she speak of him to Sybil? Would she expose his treachery? would she claim his love? All these thoughts had crowded the man's mind during the day.

It was an intense relief to him to meet Sybil, and know she had learnt nothing, and it was a second relief when he made his way to the square gate, found the gardens empty, and the gate locked, although with this relief there mingled an irritation and a desire passing words.

Kit's action was eloquent in its silence. He knew full well that at this blow the girl had awakened to the knowledge of life in its bitterest sense—that the dreamland was gone for ever, and that her young heart would be struck to the core; but, true to his indomitable egotism, Maurice Montgomery had no qualms of conscience over the destruction of his own hand had worked; he was only full of annoyance and disappointment that his plans should have failed so signally, and that he had lost something which he would have valued in possession just as long as the charm of novelty had existed, and which he would then have discarded as easily as though a friendless woman's honour and heart were of no more account than an old glove or a broken toy.

He stayed a little while longer, and then returned to Sybil with a new lie on his lips and anger in his heart; while above, in her small room, Kit was sitting crouched up on her bed,

tearless, calm, stunned into a dazed, desolate state by the horrible blow that had fallen upon her so swiftly and so surely.

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,079. Back numbers can be obtained through all Newsagents.

#### THE TOWER OF LONDON.

Of all the places of interest in London the Tower of London is perhaps the most notable. It occupies an extensive area in the east part of London, on the north bank of the Thames. Its vicinity to a busy part of the City detracts greatly from the picturesque effect, though to the reflective observer it teaches a lesson of infinitely more value than mere grandeur. Though at first occupied as a royal palace, the Tower is best known in history as a State prison. Its terrors, however, as a prison are now over.

Of the buildings, as they now stand, the White Tower is the most conspicuous, and the most ancient. It stands nearly in the centre of the inner ward. In one of its "dungeons" it is traditionally stated that Sir Walter Raleigh was confined, and that it was here he wrote his celebrated History of the World.

The chapel is the last resting-place of many illustrious persons, who either died in the Tower or were beheaded on Tower Hill. Here lie Gerald Fitzgerald, ninth Earl of Kildare, and Lord Deputy of Ireland; Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard, two of the wives of Henry VIII.; Thomas Cromwell, one of Henry's favourites and victims; the Duke of Somerset; the unfortunate Lady Grey and her husband; the Duke of Norfolk, who was beheaded for aspiring to the hand of Mary Queen of Scots; his son, the Earl of Arundel; and the gay but rash favourite of Queen Elizabeth, the Earl of Essex.

The last persons who were beheaded on the scaffold on Tower Hill were four Scotch lords concerned in the rebellion of 1745. In the latter part of the eighteenth century the excited state of public feeling brought a number of prisoners within its walls. Sir Francis Burdett was imprisoned there in 1810. The persons concerned in the plot to murder certain members of the government in 1820 were the last State prisoners confined in the Tower.

The Bloody Tower forms the principal entrance from the outer to the inner ward. It is supposed to have acquired its name from the rooms over the gateway having been the residence and scene of the murder of Edward V., and his brother, the Duke of York. That these young princes were assassinated by command of their uncle there appears no reason to doubt. In making a staircase in the White Tower after the Restoration, the labourers dug up some bones which were covered by a heap of stones. Charles II. was satisfied that these bones were the remains of the brothers, and he had them interred in Westminster Abbey.

Sir Thomas More, whose history of the fate of the young princes embodies all that has been popularly believed concerning them, was himself committed to the Tower, and was beheaded on Tower Hill. Queen Elizabeth was, for a time, closely confined in the Tower, and acquired there a part of that education and training which prepared her for her long and glorious reign.

The crown jewels are kept in a small tower immediately beyond the east end of the Grand Staircase. As early as the reign of Henry III. these jewels were placed in the Tower, from whence they were frequently taken by different monarchs when their necessities drove them to pawn them. They are perhaps the most splendid collection of jewels in existence to-day. They represent a value of over three million pounds, and are strongly guarded by iron bars and watchmen. A fac-simile of the Kohinoor, the world's famous diamond, is among the collection, but the original is carefully guarded at Windsor Castle.

Before the general use of firearms, there

were various officers in the Tower to whom were entrusted the care and repair of military weapons and armour. The offices held by these persons were abolished in the reign of Charles II.

The Execution Spot, which is marked by a small square, is the site formerly occupied by the scaffold on which were beheaded the majority of the prisoners of State. Death is there associated with whatever is darkest in human nature and human destiny, with the ingratitude and cowardice of friends, and with all the miseries of fallen greatness and blighted fame.

#### THE SMALL COIN OF CONVERSATION.

Perpetual talkers are apt to become bores, and yet we could not very well get along without them. Many an awkward pause has been covered by the speech that "goes on for ever." Though it is said that the greatest talkers are generally women, there are many men who run them close, especially when they have left their youth in the rear, and many and varied are the different kinds of talkers to be met with in society. There is the kind who, directly he or she gets the lead, goes on so steadily that no one else has a chance of getting in a word even edgeways, and when two of this sort meet it is amusing to watch the attempts of the second to "cut in." There is the kind, too, whose conversation generally consists of asking questions, though, fortunately for the person questioned, they rarely wait long enough for an answer to be given. Then there is the kind who will be heard, will express their opinions and air their grievances. Still, when all is said, it is better to talk when in the society of others, even if one has not anything particularly brilliant to discourse upon. The ideal talker is the one who knows not only how to talk, but when to talk, who is able to start a subject, and keep the lead, if necessary, yet is willing to follow and take but a humble part; one whose talk is not too clever or too learned (for there is a difference between the two) for ordinary mortals, and yet is not entirely confined to his or her own interests—is not only of horses and dogs, or of servants and babies. We cannot all hope to be that. Yet it is the duty of everybody to try and talk pleasantly and intelligently, to take a part in the conversation going on around us, even if it be but a minor one.

#### VERY IRRITATING.

A piano-tuner had nearly finished his work on the piano when he looked up and said to the lady of the house,—

"Your instrument was in an awful condition. You ought to have sent for me sooner."

"It was tuned only three months ago."

"Then the man who did it was ignorant of his business."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it, ma'am. He ought to be sawing wood or cleaning the streets instead of tuning piano. A delicate instrument like a piano needs fingers equally delicate to handle it, and it needs an accurate ear too. The person who attempted to tune this instrument last evidently had neither."

Here the tuner regarded his own hands complacently, and then continued—

"In fact, I am free to say that he did more harm than good."

"I can hardly think it is so bad as that."

"Well, he certainly didn't do it any good."

May I ask who the man was?"

"Certainly. It was yourself."

"Madam, you are mistaken. I never tuned a piano in this house before."

"Probably not; but you tuned that instrument nevertheless, or attempted to. It belonged to Mrs. Jones, of whom I bought it. She told me you had always tuned it and to send for you when it needed tuning again."

On his way home the man reflected solemnly on the irritating way some women have of presenting facts.

# JUDITH

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"MISS SAHIB, it is the English mail come in."

Judith had been standing at the window, watching aimlessly the movements of Mr. Sherston and his guest as they walked outside and talked together, but had never noticed that a scarlet-coated chuprasse joined them, and gave something into the Commissioner's hand. Now she was roused from her apathy by the Madrasse's voice behind her; the next moment she was speeding over the grass, and had reached them before the two gentlemen knew she had left the house. In the Commissioner's grasp was a letter with the English postmarks and stamps, and she had seen it was addressed to herself, when Mr. Johnson, with a muttered exclamation, put his hand hastily upon it.

"It is for me!" she cried, a sharp ring of defiance in her voice.

"I beg your pardon," Mr. Johnson began, but the Commissioner put him peremptorily to one side.

"Yes, there is a letter for you, Miss Holt," he admitted, and gave it to her at once, the other scowling with baffled rage.

Clasping her prize tightly to her breast, and panting a little from suppressed excitement, Judith withdrew some paces to where a garden seat was fixed under the shadow of a peepul tree. There she sat down, and, after a slight pause, during which she recovered her composure, opened the letter.

Johnson pulled the Commissioner's sleeve in angriest impatience.

"You were mad to give it her. I believe you will repeat it to the last day of your life!" he said, venomously.

"Why, what is it you fear?"

He put away his glasses, and looked straight into the man's face as he spoke, and Johnson's eyes fell beneath his gaze; he was compelled to equivocate.

"Nothing, nothing definite, I mean; but the girl is dangerous, beyond a doubt, and the fewer weapons she holds the better—for us both."

Then Mr. Sherston knew that the story Judith had told him was a true one, that the unscrupulous adventurer who had wrecked his life had also destroyed her prospects. For a moment he felt indignant, inclined to avenge her wrongs and his own at the same time, but a strain of cowardice, ever inherent in his nature, stifled the wholesome impulse, and he resolved to use the knowledge he had gained in self-defence.

"I cannot think what damage an English letter can do you, unless, of course, there were passages in your life there as discreditable."

"Are you not unwise to use such a word in connection with an affair by which you certainly gained more than it?" interrupted Johnson, with an evil look in his near-set eyes.

Mr. Sherston quailed before it, and said something unintelligible about having been "led away," and "cat's-paw always"; observations which Mr. Johnson received with sinister amusement.

"Whoever was most to blame, remember this," he declared, impressively, "that what affects me will also affect you. I will not fall alone!" Then turned and went into the house.

In the meantime, with throbbing pulses, Judith read her letter, which was from Mr. Holt, and in answer to the one she had written expressing her suspicion that the Mr. Collett, whose roguery had ruined them, was under the same roof with her, though bearing another name.

"It seems too wonderful," Mr. Holt wrote, "that big though the world may be, it is

yet small enough to admit of a meeting between you and the man who injured you beyond forgiveness. For it is of you only I think now; my own wrongs I can ignore, but that you should have been, through Collett's villainy sent out into the world friendless and forlorn I can never forget.

"Should your surmises prove correct I will become a fatalist at once, and firmly believe henceforth that as the blood of Abel cried for vengeance from the ground, so all crime is bound to be discovered in the end, no efforts, no hiding-place suffering to escape from the consequences of sin—its just punishment.

"I am writing to catch the mail, and having b—some mishap only received your letter to-day, have had no time to think how best to advise you. I must speak to Avon, and when we have decided what is the right course to pursue will write again. But that means a whole week's delay, and if once that scoundrel gets a scent of his danger he will be off, and certainly give no such an opportunity again.

"Should you consider it better to act at once, lay the matter before Mr. Sherston. He being a civilian, and experienced, probably, in such cases, will know and tell you what to do.

"You ask for a photograph of Matthew Collett. I have never seen one, and do not think it probable he would allow to be extant such fatal evidence against him, for it is unlikely that his offence against me was his first, nor, I am sure, was it unpremeditated. He would be certain to take all possible precautions.

"However, by great good luck, as I started to write this who should come in but young Glinton, of the Foreign Office (formerly your admirer, and especially famous as a first-class caricaturist—a fact you may remember). It appears he met Collett once or twice, and being struck with his peculiar and most villainous physiognomy, made two or three attempts at a sketch of him, all more or less successful, and the best of which I enclose.

"Such marked features, and so diabolical an expression it would be almost impossible to mistake; but, dear child, let me implore you to do nothing rash, nor risk drawing down upon yourself a desperate enmity by making an accusation about which there is any doubt. Unless absolutely confident of success do nothing. Even to me, who wish to believe what you have told me, it seems improbable that you should have come upon the man without any effort of your own, and even supposing thus it had happened so, would not your name, the knowledge of who you were, have frightened him away before this?"

The letter did not end there, but Judith went no further.

She was too excited, too eager to see the sketch and judge for herself whether her suspicions had any foundation at all.

Unfolding a sheet of paper that had remained in the envelope, she gazed at it a moment, then started to her feet, and a faint cry of conviction escaped her lips.

Feature for feature, the spirited likeness she held agreed with the lineaments of the man she was anxious to denounce; only the hair was different, and that she easily understood could be altered to suit his pleasure.

Wonderful, improbable as it doubtless was, it was also true that Fate, playing into her hands, had brought them together, and nothing seemed to remain for her to do but to say out all she knew to condemn and crush him beyond all hope of revival!

With lips compressed, and flashing eyes, she had made a movement to go to the house before she saw that Mr. Sherston stood before her, and was watching her intently.

"I wanted to see you," she exclaimed, excitedly. "Long ago I made a statement

which you disbelieved. May I prove it to you now?"

"I shall be most happy to listen to what you have to say."

"I told you then that Mr. Johnson was an impostor. I told you that under another name he had defrauded my father and others of large sums of money; that he was a swindler, an adventurer, and under no circumstances fit to come into the presence of Winifred, much less to aspire to be her husband!"

"I remember your making some very wild statements. Is it possible you think that you can prove them?"

"Think! I know it! Look there, Mr. Sherston!"

She held the paper before his eyes, her finger shaking so that he had to steady it with his own hand as well.

"Look there! That is the face of the man who ruined us ten months ago! Can you deny it is the face of Mr. Johnson too?"

He pretended to gaze at it deliberately, as though weighing the matter in his mind, with the view of coming to an incontestable decision; but, in reality, after the first quick glance, everything swam before his eyes, and he was only considering how best to dissuade Judith from prosecuting the advantage she had gained.

Not a doubt remained that Johnson was guilty of this as well as the fault in which he himself had been implicated; but how was it possible to use this knowledge?

Could he employ it as a threat to ensure his own safety, or were their interests too closely allied for there to be any question of a struggle between them?

Was it a fact, as Johnson had confidently asserted, that they must stand or fall together, and that so long as they both should live, he, the weaker spirit, must remain in subservience to the stronger nature of this man, who feared nothing, had stopped at no crime that could serve his own schemes?

In any case, it was clear to him that he must, if possible, keep the power in his own hands, and by no means allow Judith to hold such a winning card.

"Do you see that I am right?" asked the girl, impatiently.

He allowed his gold-rimmed glasses to drop, and, drawing the paper away from her, folded it up in thoughtful silence.

"There is a strong resemblance. I can understand your being struck by it," he said, presently, when, her eyes still fixed questioning upon his own, she waited for him to speak.

"Nothing more than that?"

"Nothing more," easily, misled by the quietness of her tone.

"Then I think you must be wilfully blind! There is some reason why you should wish to shield that wretch!"

Her voice rang out resolute and clear, with an accent of power for which Mr. Sherston was by no means prepared, though he tried to appear at ease still, and, as a precautionary measure, put away the sketch carefully in his pocket.

"That is mine!" she cried, stretching out her hand.

"Pardon me. Such an accusation as you have made cannot so lightly be set aside. Mr. Johnson is my guest. It is my business to clear his character, and I shall not rest till I can refute all you have said. This sketch, which may or may not be a likeness of the person for whom it is intended, must remain in my possession, certainly for the present."

Conscious of the strong position he held, Mr. Sherston's manner was perfectly assured, and, rebellious as Judith felt, she knew no objection would avail.

"What are you going to do?" she questioned, obstinately.

"In the first place, I shall ask him point-blank where the last two years of his life

we spent, and he must prove to me beyond a doubt that he is speaking truth."

This sounded reasonable enough, and at first Judith could find no opposite reply.

"But supposing," she said, eventually, very slowly and deliberately, "that what satisfied you did not satisfy me?"

"I should regret it extremely, more especially as I should always expect those living in my house to respect my judgment and abide by my decision," he returned, with cold politeness.

Judith bit her lips as she realised the hopelessness of her struggle, her own folly in allowing the proof she had possessed against Johnson to pass out of her hands. She sighed deeply, and the Commissioner, who was a kind man at heart, felt ashamed of the victory he had gained, sorry for her disappointment. He laid his hand upon her shoulder gently.

"Believe me, I will do my best for us all; but you must reconcile yourself to the fact that it is useless fighting against great odds; my battle in which a woman engages must be an unequal one. Try to overcome your enmity to Johnson. Whatever he has done in the past he is strong enough to defend in the present. You will gain no good by trying to prove anything against him; your efforts may end in your own discomfiture."

"I am fighting for your daughter, not for myself!" she reminded him, reproachfully. "To rescue her from such an unhappy marriage I am prepared to risk something."

"You will do no good, no good!" he muttered awkwardly, and hurried away.

He went through the verandah into the long corridor, and scarcely noticing where his footsteps led him, walked straight into his wife as she came out of a small room which commanded a view of that part of the garden where he and Judith had been talking for the last half hour.

She had witnessed the scene from the beginning to the end, understanding that it had had some serious import, and noticing, with jealous eyes, the friendly touch upon the shoulder with which he had tried to soothe the girl's excitement. Now, white with rage, she confronted him.

"You must not stop me, Bella; I am busy," he observed, quickly, feeling certain, from her attitude, that something had gone wrong.

"Not too busy to talk to that girl," with infinite contempt expressed in the preposition.

"My dear, you do not understand—"

"I understand well enough," she interrupted. "I understand that latterly you seem to have forgotten you have a wife whose presence in your house you are bound to respect—if no other consideration has any weight."

"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean?" she retorted. "You have outraged my pride, wounded my affections, ignored me altogether. It is cruel—dameful!"

He stared at her in speechless surprise, bewildered by her words as well as by her unusual demonstration, not comprehending in the least what had caused them both. His first thought was to avoid a scene, and he pushed her gently back into the room she had just quitted.

"Come in here and explain yourself quietly. What is it I have done?" he asked.

"You think I have neither eyes nor ears. That you never loved me I know, but it is only lately that you have attempted to let other women fill the place that is mine by right. I tell you, prevarication is useless. I know that Mrs. Trevor visited you at your office last week, and remained with you alone for more than an hour. I was witness to your interview with Miss Holt just now."

"If you had heard every word that passed," he began, helplessly.

"But I did not hear. I was not even meant to know, probably, that these meetings had

ever occurred, but, having become aware of them, I warn you solemnly that I will not submit tamely to such insults; I will resent them without a doubt!"

She had drawn herself up primly, and her hard features might have been cut from wood or stone, so impervious did they seem to any softening influence. It seemed impossible to connect them with any emotion—even jealousy, the least lovely of them all.

"Pahaw! my dear, you are talking nonsense, and you know it," said her husband, impatiently. "I am beyond the age for such follies, as you might guess, and, even if it were not so, it would be ridiculous for you to pretend to care. We married without love, and if, since then, we have discovered our mistake, at least, in common decency, let us conceal the fact, even from each other."

"You mean you regret our marriage?" with a break-in her voice he was too irritated to note.

"If I have to make you happy, certainly I do."

"Perhaps," satirically, "you wish you had married someone else?"

"Perhaps I do," he retorted, goaded beyond endurance by her manner, and the tone she had adopted.

Gathering her skirts around her, as though to avoid the slightest contact, and flashing at him a single glance of unutterable wrath, she swept from the room; and he heaved a sigh of relief, too delighted to be freed from the aggravation of the attack to consider the cost at which he had gained a respite.

So serious was the danger to which he was now exposed that this exultation of his wife's seemed of little consequence; nor did he dream for a moment that she seriously believed she had real cause for jealousy or anger.

Her tempers had been too frequent, and often too groundless, for him to feel disturbed at this, and he was only too glad that she was gone, leaving him to think over all that had happened that morning—Johnson's threats, and Judith's quieter determination to succeed in what she had undertaken.

The former might be won over if he chose to give in to him, and consider their interests identical—as, in fact, they were. The latter would, he felt sure, do what she considered right, at whatever cost.

If only she had never entered their house! if only she could be got out of the way, so that they need fear her no more!

A touch on his arm startled him, and, turning, he saw his wife had returned, and was looking sternly at him.

"Julius," she said, authoritatively, "after what you have said, there is only one course open to us. The girl must go!"

"What girl?" he questioned, feebly.

"Judith Holt. She and I can never live under the same roof again!"

He burst into a harsh laugh, then began a half-careless disclaimer, the fault of which he was supposed to be guilty seeming too ridiculous to be confuted in sober earnest.

A second thought restrained him. If his wife believed him to be in love with Judith, she would certainly find an excuse for getting rid of her at once, thus relieving him from the onus of an act that would doubtless be insisted on by Johnson when informed of the circumstances of this last interview.

It was imperative the girl should go; she knew too much, and would dare too much, for Winifred's sake. Why should not her departure be based on this ground as well as on any other?

For a second he hesitated, finding it difficult to credit that Mrs. Sherston could possibly be blind to the absurdity of her own accusation. Then he declared, with well-acted reluctance—

"You are right. It is better she should go."

So Judith's fate was sealed.

### CHAPTER XXVIII.

The fever which had prevented Winifred going to Mrs. Hare's picnic, and which had been treated very lightly, proved to be more serious than at first supposed. When, after three days, it refused to succumb to the ordinary course of quinine, the Commissioner deemed it necessary to send for the doctor, who shook his head, and reiterated his former opinion.

"The girl had no constitution whatever, and should not be in India a day longer than absolutely obliged to remain. At present, he believed it to be simply fever from which she was suffering, but she was very weak, and seemed to have no spirit to combat with any ailment, however slight."

This last symptom Judith had also noticed, and grew alarmed as another day passed, and there was still no perceptible improvement in her state.

Fever is such an insidious disease, and, creeping on so quietly and painlessly, still manages to sap away all energy and strength, leaving its victim utterly prostrate for the time, and weaker after each attack.

Winifred had been confined to her room for nearly a week, when, struck by her frail appearance, Judith resolved to speak, and did so, sharply.

"You don't try to get well. It makes me miserable to see you lying there, scarcely ever sleeping, and only taking a spoonful of soup when I make you swallow it. That jelly has been by your side all day, and you have not touched a mouthful."

"I have so much inducement to get well!" with bitter emphasis.

"Winifred, how can you be so wicked? Have you no faith?"

"I have no hope, which is the same thing."

"But you must hope; you must have faith that such a sacrifice will never be permitted. No one can force you to marry the man."

"Next Tuesday is my wedding-day."

"That will be postponed, of course, even if not put a stop to altogether. I cannot believe that your father will allow—"

"He cannot help himself—nor me," interrupted Winifred, in tones which, to the other, sounded pitifully weak.

She returned, quickly—

"But Mr. Johnson must be made to listen to reason. He must release you when he knows how you hate him—how terrible such a marriage must be!"

Winifred shook her head sadly.

"He has no mercy—none. If it suited his purpose he would marry me—on my death-bed."

"Oh, hush!" cried Judith, sharply.

The word had struck her with a strange chill, and made her mute from the horror of a hitherto unacknowledged fear.

Was it so bad as this? Was Winifred really going to die, and die because living was too hard a task under the cruel circumstances of her fate? Nervously she stole a glance at her, and could gather no consolation from what she saw.

Flushed and weary from the late discussion, she lay back on her pillows with eyes half-closed, her dry lips parted, while on the coverlet one hand was lying white and painfully thin.

Judith went forward and touched it; it was burning hot, and the girl shivered nervously, and opened her eyes with a start.

"Go to sleep, dear, and I will stay with you. I will do all I can for you. I will save you, if possible, I promise," whispered Judith, earnestly; and, too exhausted to reply, Winifred sank presently into an easy slumber.

Half-an-hour later Mrs. Sherston came in, and began talking about some outside matter, until Judith put up her hand to entreat silence.

"She is asleep," she said, in a low voice.

"Nonsense!" sharply. "Her eyes are half-open. She is a little tired, I daresay."

She always sleeps like that now. I think it must be weakness. Mrs. Sherston, she is very ill."

"Weak, of course, but, after all, it is only fever. There is no danger."

"Are you sure of that? Just now she talked of dying, and I think she does not care to live."

"Not care to live!" repeated Mrs. Sherston, in horrified surprise.

Judith only paused a moment, during which she had resolved to appeal for assistance.

After all, hard and crotchety as the woman was, she was the girl's mother, and surely had a right to know of her unhappiness, and to help her to escape from it, if possible.

"It is true what I say. Winifred would rather die than marry Mr. Johnson. She only consented to please her father—to save him, I believe, from some threatened danger, and now she finds the promise she made more than she can fulfil. It is breaking her heart; it will kill her if someone does not interfere."

She was trembling with excitement, and, for the moment, she carried her hearer away with her, for at heart the Commissioner's wife was not so hard, not so emotionless, as in outward seeming.

She loved her daughter, though she made no profession of her affection, often finding fault with her and twitting her with her non-success in society.

It had been a bitter disappointment to her when, five years ago, Winifred had come out to India, pale and spiritless, with no brilliant qualities to redeem the plainness of her features.

Then came her attachment to young Stamer, who had neither birth nor wealth, nor even good looks, to recommend him; while, since that time, no other suitor had offered himself. And having no longer any pride in the girl, nor hope of her making any better match, Mrs. Sherston had been very willing to sanction his attentions; but now a motherly tenderness—only dormant in her nature, not extinct—made her doubt whether, after all, her first duty was to the world.

Surely it was better that she should bear the onus of possessing an unmarried daughter to the end of her days than that Winifred's happiness, perhaps her life, should be imperilled.

Her face softened wonderfully as she half-decided to interpose in her behalf—if, indeed, it were true that she could never care for Mr. Johnson, nor even endure his love for her.

Judith saw the change in her expression, and bent eagerly forward to press her advantage.

"You will do what you can?" she urged, imploringly.

"Very often, when our intentions are best, our actions are the less calculated to gain our ends—a look too long, a movement too impulsive, defeating the object we had in view."

So it was in this case.

The beautiful face, so close now to her own, the soft, sweet voice, as she pleaded earnestly, seemed to turn the woman's heart to adamant. She could not have yielded gracefully even had she felt inclined, while a moment's reflection decided her; it was better to resist, not to countenance such folly.

"My husband and I can judge what is best for our daughter. She has never complained to us."

"She never will," broke in Judith.

"Then we can only infer that she is content with matters as they are, and that you have grossly exaggerated the circumstances of the case," was the cold, inflexible reply.

"Oh! surely you can see for yourself. No words are needed to tell you she is not happy."

"I am afraid I have not so highly-strung an organisation, nor such keenly imaginative powers, as you."

Her hatred of the girl was shown so plainly,

so unsparingly, that it was impossible to mistake her meaning, much less ignore it.

Judith gave a faint gasp, and stood staring at her for a moment, utterly perplexed as to the cause of it, though aware that some crisis was impending. Then, with a deep sigh, she turned away and moved towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Sherston questioned, sharply.

"I—I don't know."

"I think I do. You are going to Mr. Sherston."

"If I thought it would do any good—"

"Whether it would or no, I forbid you to speak to him on that or any other subject, and while you remain an inmate of my house I expect you to obey my wishes."

Her naturally shrill-toned voice rose almost to a scream in her jealous rage, and roused Winifred, who moved and moaned faintly.

Mrs. Sherston gave her some soup, and sat down in the chair beside her bed, with her back turned towards Judith, who stood irresolute for some moments, then went out, closing the door softly.

Outside, in the corridor, she hesitated again.

Mrs. Sherston had absolutely forbidden her to speak to the Commissioner; yet how else could she fulfil her promise to Winifred?

It was her only hope, and surely not an unfounded one, that when he understood how critical was his daughter's case he would decline to accept such a sacrifice at her hands.

She must see him, pray to him, whatever the consequences might be.

Not for an instant did she underrate the serious nature of Mrs. Sherston's threat, though quite unable to account for her displeasure, nor had she misunderstood the hint conveyed in her last sentence.

It was this decided her, if, indeed, any impetus were needed to persuade her, to pursue what she considered the right course.

As, in any case, she was to be sent away, it mattered little if her departure were precipitated or no. She would certainly take her chance of that.

Hastily crossing to the door of Mr. Sherston's private room, she knocked, asked for, and obtained permission to enter; then, being once inside, stood silent, half-frightened at her own temerity.

The Commissioner's face, scarcely encircled by her, scarcely herded her to proceed; any visitor would have been unwelcome at that moment; and most of all, the girl who had proved so disturbing an element lately in his life.

The fear that had come into Judith's mind had also struck him for the first time that very day. That very morning, standing by her bedside, he had asked himself whether Winifred were not seriously ill; and, again, whether, if she died, he would not be responsible for her death?

A moment before he had taken up his pen to write to Johnson, but the paper lay before him, blank still, for he could find no words to frame a request that even in his own heart was blurred and indistinct.

What was it he really wanted?

Was he brave enough to face the effects of such a letter as alone could suffice to free his daughter from the chains that had been involuntarily forged?

It was this doubt that had made him hesitate; and as Judith entered he waited for her to speak, allowing his manner to signify the annoyance he felt at the intrusion.

"It is about Winifred—I wanted to talk to you," she began.

"Is she worse?" he interrogated, quickly, and, as he asked the question, became aware how great had been his anxiety, how cruel would be the blow were the answer to be "Yes."

"It is impossible for me to say. I only know she is no better, and seems very weak, very nervous. It seems to me that she does not want to recover; that is why I came to you."

His face betrayed so keen an interest in her words that she went on, more surely.

"I have no right to speak to you of this at all. You are her father, and her happiness is surely more to you than it can ever be to me who love her very dearly too. But it is my duty to tell you what I know—know from her own lips—that so long as living means marrying Mr. Johnson, she would rather die."

"She told you that?"

Judith nodded gravely.

"Then you think this engagement should be cancelled at all hazards?"

"I do not presume to advise you. I only tell you the plain fact as I heard it an hour ago. You know best what induced her to make the promise; you know if it can be broken. I am almost in the dark, but I could not stand aside to see her sinking so day by day, and not make an effort to save her. It is terrible to see her suffering, and always trying so bravely to conceal her pain from me. Oh! it is true, for I have seen it in her face. That marriage with that man would be worse to her than death!"

Before Mr. Sherston's mental vision rose Winifred's face as he had seen it that morning, the deep sadness in her eyes, while her lips smiled; and the thought struck him that were he to persist in his scheme of self-preservation he would be killing her as surely as though he struck a knife into her heart.

Tears of compunction sprang into his eyes, and, rising from his seat, he seized Judith's hand and wrung it cordially.

"I thank you, Miss Holt, for your plain speaking; it has done its work. Winifred shall be made happy this very day, let who will suffer in her stead!"

He spoke with impulsive warmth, and Judith had never liked him so well, never respected him so much, though she said no word, only looked her gratitude and gladness; indeed, there was no more to say, her mission was ended, and successfully so.

Left alone, the Commissioner's enthusiasm slowly died out, and he realised what he had done, though not repenting it. He would not go back from his word, but he knew what was involved in the keeping of it, and that even though Winifred were saved in one way, she was ruined in another, since what affected him affected his family as well.

For about the twentieth time he dipped his pen in the ink, and this time the words flowed freely enough; his mind being once made up, he was perfectly reckless of results.

He was more than half-way through his letter, when another rap came to the door. Reluctantly again he said, "Come in."

This time it was Mr. Johnson who entered, and the Commissioner let his pen fall, and moved restlessly in his seat.

"I hope I do not disturb you," said the intruder, suavely.

"I was writing to you then. Perhaps what I wished to tell you can be settled best by word of mouth."

A keen, inquiring glance was darted from between Mr. Johnson's half-closed eyes.

He paused, and then, with intention, ignoring what had been said, he went on, pleasantly—

"The mail has just come in, and there is something here that will interest you. Let me be the first to congratulate—Sir Julius Sherston!"

He held out the newspaper, smiling; and, hastily snatching it away, the Commissioner assured himself that it was no joke, but an undoubted fact, that the honour expected and desired so long was conferred upon him at last. He read the paragraph over twice, then looked up to find the other's gaze bent full upon him.

"Well, Sir Julius, and what is it that you have to say to me?" he asked, smiling still, but not pleasantly.

The newly-made K.C.S.I. fidgeted and fumbled with the paper he still held, like invi-

schoolboy going to his master with an unlearned lesson.

Was it a device of the devil to lure him from the right path that this coveted title should be assured to him at the very moment when he had firmly resolved to give up all prospects of worldly advancement for his daughter's sake?

With a desperate effort he replied, with apparent composure—

"It is about Winifred I wished to speak to you. She is seriously ill, and I have only too great cause to believe that her engagement to you is preying on her mind, and preventing her recovery."

"And what is it you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to release her from it."

"Anything else you may claim I will not refuse, any sum of money, any—anything I do not want, in fact. Pshaw, my dear Sherston, you are too amusing, but unhappily I am not in the humour for such a jest. A bargain is a bargain, and I insist upon ours being ratified. Nothing else will content me."

"And if I refuse to fulfil my part of it?"

An evil glitter came into Mr. Johnson's near-set eyes, his brows met in a portentous frown, as he answered, slowly—

"Then you must be prepared for the consequences! I warn you I shall have no mercy! I will denounce you to the Government, and dear myself!"

His words were not without their effect.

The Commissioner became as white as death, his lips working painfully, while insinuatively one hand was thrown over the letter he was writing to cover its contents.

He knew what it was he had promised, to give up, how dear to him would be the honour only now received, how welcome to his wife; and yet it must be put aside, and with it all he had enjoyed so long, and for the pleasure of a foolish child, who, perhaps, did not know her own mind, and who might even (so variable are women) reproach him some day for his action in the matter.

It was very easy to persuade himself, as he thought it over, that Winifred was not so ill as he had imagined, only more obstinate; and, having got so far, not difficult to advance a step further, and decide that Judith was endeavouring to serve her own interests; that vindictive hatred of the man who, it seemed probable, had injured her deeply, not pity for Winifred, had prompted her appeal.

Such specious arguments could not but influence a mind only too eager to be convinced.

He had got his answer ready even before Mr. Johnson asked the definite question.

"Well, what have you settled to do?"

"I suppose the matter had better be left as it is now. When Winifred recovers, she will be your wife."

He did not look up as he spoke. His eyes seemed glued to the ground, and a deep flush suffused his forehead. But Johnson was content to leave well alone, and took no notice of either symptom of shame.

With a few words, expressing his satisfaction at the agreement to which they had come, he withdrew, and the wretched man was left once more to himself, to think over what he had done, and the ignoble motives that had caused his decision.

Later in the day, Judith received a note from him as she was going to Winifred's room which came with the stunning force of an actual blow.

It ran as follows:—

"Dear Miss Holt,—I spoke impulsively and without thought when you came to me this morning. Since then, sober reflection has assured me that any change is impossible, that Winifred must abide by the promise she made of her own free will. Requesting that the subject may not be re-opened—Sincerely yours,

"JULIUS SHERSTON."

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

When Judith read Mr. Sherston's note, without a moment's hesitation she turned and went back to her room.

She felt she could not face Winifred as matters were; a little suspense would be better for her, surely, than a state of hopelessness. Moreover, she had not the courage to tell her outright that she had done what she could to save her—and failed.

All night long she listened to the sounds that came through the door that divided the sick-room from her own, and guessed that they were getting alarmed about Winifred, and convinced at last it was not a simple case of fever.

Early in the morning the doctor came, and as he was going out Judith intercepted him in the passage.

"Tell me," she said, abruptly. "How is she now?"

"Very ill, very weak and ill. Unless a great change occurs she cannot live another day; she has no stamina at all."

He spoke gravely, and with no exaggeration of manner.

To Mr. and Mrs. Sherston he had not been so explicit, but to her he thought he might speak the whole truth, as she was no connection—only an outsider.

He was startled, and repented his candour when he saw the ashen pallor that spread over the girl's face; and hastened to add, in extenuation of his words—

"Of course, she is very young, and youth is always in one's favour. What has struck me most since I have been attending her is her listlessness. It reminds me more of a person ending life than one only at its commencement."

"I am not sure that life ends at any particular age," said Judith, sadly.

The doctor scrutinised her keenly.

"Is that it?" he asked, a look of intelligence creeping slowly over his heavy features. "I was wondering whether any sentimental trouble were at the bottom of her strange apathy. If that be so, my interference can do little or no good. It is mental medicine she wants, and if her parents wish to save her life they must tell her at once she may marry the man she loves, whoever he is; another day, and it may be too late. She is literally fretting herself into the grave."

He bustled away as he spoke, with a cheery nod and a smile, in spite of the serious nature of his communication.

Having for many years been inured to the mysteries of life and death, they had lost their solemnity to him. He could go straight from the most harrowing scene to his game of tennis or a rubber of whist, and enjoy either.

Not so Judith. She had only room for the one thought, that there was a chance still Winifred might get well, if only she were told that recovery meant freedom, not a bondage worse than death.

The doctor's words, though he had misinterpreted the facts of the case, seemed plainly to imply so much, and bitterly she regretted she had failed in her endeavour, that now nothing remained for her to do, that her promise must be unredeemed to the end.

A little later she went into Winifred's room.

She was lying, white and passive, on her pillows, one blue-veined hand resting carelessly on Dandy's silky head; but she looked round when she heard Judith's step.

For a full moment she gazed at her, trying to read all that was in her face; then, as it became clear to her and clearer still that there was no hope—absolutely none—her eyelids dropped, and she gave a little weary sigh.

"I think she is unconscious," whispered Mrs. Sherston, momentarily forgetting her animosity in natural anxiety.

Judith shook her head.

"She is very weak—too weak to speak, perhaps, but she knows everything—every-

thing—I am afraid."

"What do you mean?" sharply.

Judith made no reply. It was useless answering such a question; since it seemed an indisputable fact that the effect of any appeal that she might make would be neutralised at once by Johnson's influence.

It was he who held the girl's fate in his hands, and who might save her yet, if only he were persuaded that perseverance in his scheme could do him no good now, that to temporise was the best plan, for his own sake as well as hers.

In a low voice she questioned Mrs. Sherston where Mr. Johnson was then, and heard, in return, that he had gone out on some important business, and was not expected back before evening.

All day long she remained with Winifred, nursing her with sisterly tenderness, striving to infuse new strength into the enfeebled frame, new hope into her heart.

Mrs. Sherston had gone to lie down, having been up all night, and the two were alone most of the day; but Winifred never spoke, only looked at her with her big eyes gratefully, sorrowfully, with all the pathos of a dumb animal in pain.

And all day long Dandy lay beside her, waiting patiently for her to move, making no attempt to go without her, whining wistfully now and then, as though conscious that all was not going on well with his mistress, perhaps sensible, too, of his own impotence in the matter. It was growing dusk when Judith saw Mr. Johnson pass the window on his way to his own room.

Winifred was sleeping, so she could leave her without compunction, calling to Mrs. Sherston as she passed her door to tell her she would be away for the next half-hour.

Then, having determined in her own mind what she was going to do, she went on and knocked boldly at Mr. Johnson's door.

He came and opened it himself, his face expressing intense surprise as he saw who it was.

"Is Winifred worse?" he asked, quickly.

"She is very ill indeed. Can I speak to you for a moment, Mr. Johnson?"

"I am always at your disposal. Where shall we talk? I am afraid there is not much privacy outside here in the corridor," as first one servant and then another passed down.

"The drawing-room?"

"I left Sir Julius writing letters there. Will you come into my room?"

Without hesitating, she complied, standing near the door, and impatiently declining the chair he pushed forward for her acceptance.

"What I have to say will not take long," he told him. "Mr. Johnson, have you any idea how ill Winifred is?"

"I know that she is worse to-day—very weak—and has taken very little nourishment, her father says."

"The doctor said this morning she was dying."

Though he attempted to conceal it, Judith saw that her words were to him a surprise—a shock.

As he lifted his hands to stroke down his moustaches—a favourite action with him when he wished to hide the expression of his mouth—she saw his fingers trembling, and took courage to go on.

"There was only one hope of saving her life, he thought, and now it may be too late for even that to do any good. He said if she were free from anxiety she might regain her strength."

"And how do you propose to ease her mind?" he asked, a cynical smile dawning on his lips, believing that he understood now the motive of her visit.

"It is you who can do that by releasing her from her engagement. Tell her that so far as you are concerned, her father is safe, and she may get better yet."

He laughed softly to himself, and stood looking at her for a moment in apparently irrepressible amusement. Then he said, with aggravating gentleness—

"It is an admirably-conceived plan, Miss Holt, and I congratulate you upon its manufacture, for I am sure my poor little bride-elect would never have evolved it out of her own imagination alone; but I am neither young enough nor trusting enough to take your story seriously. Even if it were true—"

"It is true!" broke in Judith, indignantly. He shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who indulges a child already spoilt.

"Even if it were true, Miss Holt, I could not afford to listen to your prayers. Too much is involved. If Winifred lives she must be my wife."

"And if she dies?"

"Then my luck is worse than I have believed it; but I do not believe she will die."

He spoke quite coolly, and with such utter heartlessness that Judith felt her courage fail.

Of what avail was it that she should beat her heart against a rock? Why waste her entreaties on one so absolutely deaf to pity?

Her face hardened as she observed, slowly, "You are very daring, Mr. Johnson. I should have thought you had sufficient enemies without trying to make another."

"Meaning you, Miss Holt?"

"Yes, meaning me."

The cool, contemptuous smile with which he regarded her stung her into saying more.

"I may prove a more formidable antagonist than you think. I know all your past life—or, at least, those portions of it which you would sooner keep secret; how, as Michael Straughan, you started life, and by some underhand means got the Commissioner in your power, and have been preying on him ever since, until now you have reached the farthest point that surely malignity or selfishness could reach, and have asked from him the happiness—the very life—of his daughter."

"You have never done me justice in that instance. Is it any wonder that, having, as you so aptly guessed, risen from the ranks, so to speak, I should wish to marry someone in a superior position? That is only natural ambition. You cannot blame me for that?"

"Not blame you!" she cried, passionately. "I more than blame you; I hate you for your cruelty, and everybody will execrate you when I make public your antecedents, and show how you have persecuted that poor child to her death."

A look came into his face that chilled her, and seemed to assure her of the fruitlessness of all such struggling, even before he spoke.

"And do you think anyone will listen to your accusations unsupported by any proof, or, at best, the mere testimony of a disreputable acquaintance you picked up in a bazaar?" he asked, insultingly.

"Oh, I have more against you than that! For a very long time I have suspected that you are the man who ruined my father. I heard your voice once as you were leaving the house in Park Lane, and recognised it again soon after I met you here. Only this mail my father sent me the likeness of Mr. Collett, which is also a faithful portrait of yourself."

"Where is it?" quickly.

"Mr. Sherston has it at present, but I mean to ask him for it, and I will never rest till I have proved these things against you."

The angry glance she cast at him he returned with such venom that she drew back appalled.

His wicked, near-set eyes gleamed with malice, and as his thin lips curled back from his teeth she was reminded of nothing so much as a snake—a cobra—whose poisonous breath dealt instantaneous destruction.

"You will fight against me at your peril!" he hissed out. "If it once comes to war between us, I will crush you without pity! I

would hate you all the more because I loved you once!"

"Do you think you can frighten me like that?" she asked, scornfully. "I would do what I thought right, even if in so doing I courted the most cruel death. For Winifred's sake I would know no fear, deal no mercy!"

"It would scarcely be the best way of proving your love for Winifred by ruining her husband!"

He spoke cautiously, as though trying to feel his way, anxious to know what he had to fear, how far her enmity would go, and what power she possessed to thwart his plans. He kept his eyes fixed on the ground as she answered—

"You will never marry her, Mr. Johnson—never! It may be possible to save her now; but if you will not release her she will release herself! She will never live to be your wife, and if she dies I will avenge her, I swear!"

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2076. Back numbers can be obtained through all Newsagents.)

#### HOW TO STUDY.

Nobody can be sure of having imbibed clear ideas on a subject unless he has tried to put them down on a piece of paper in independent words of his own. It is an excellent plan, too, when you have read a good book, to sit down and write a short abstract of what you can remember of it. It is almost always worth while to read a thing twice over, to make sure that nothing has been missed or dropped on the way, or wrongly conceived or interpreted. And, if the subject be serious it is often well to let an interval elapse. Ideas, relations, statements of facts, are not to be taken by storm. We have to steep them in the mind, in the hope of thus extracting their inmost essence and significance. If one lets an interval pass, and then returns, it is surprising how clear and ripe that has become which, when we left it, seemed crude, obscure, full of perplexity.

#### A MARITAL LAMENT.

That I lingered at the office I have reason to regret,

For I've had the kind of welcome that I do not like to get;

Not a word, of course, unpleasant,  
But a feeling ever present.

That my path to-night with troubles is most seriously beset.

Though I had a smile of greeting, I am dining all alone,

And I know that for my thoughtlessness she's making me alone.

I perceive I'm out of favour,  
For the coffee's lost its flavour,

And the steak that looked so tempting now is colder than a stone.

But I dare not make a murmur—or, at least, I'd rather not;

I prefer the cold potatoes that are falling to my lot,

For a dinner cold is better

Than a growl that may unfetter

Some remarks as to my absence when it all was piping hot.

ONE OF THE LATEST FADS.—Some lovers, not satisfied with the ring as an outward and visible sign of their eternal love, are now exchanging eyes—not their own eyes, of course, but very good imitations of them. The engagement eye is framed in gold and painted on ivory, and is set round about with precious stones. It must be an exact reproduction of the human and individual window, not enlarged or beautified, but painted as it is. Every model must give his or her artist at least three sittings before the right shade and the perfect expression can be transferred to the little ivory replica.

#### What Constipation May Cause

##### A YOUNG LADY'S ESCAPE FROM DEATH

Constipation, if neglected, often leads to stoppage of the bowels. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans cure constipation by stimulating the liver to natural action, and in this way they saved Miss Etta Palmer, of Back 253, Great Colmore Street, Birmingham, from a serious operation in the Queen's Hospital, and probably from death.

Miss Palmer says:—"In my case, constipation and digestive disorders led to a stoppage of the bowels. I could not take nourishment, and consequently grew too feeble to work. Having taken to my bed, I got weaker and weaker. It was not thought I should live. Indeed, the clergyman of the parish came to pray at my bedside, so near death was I. The doctor called in a physician, and it was said my only hope of life lay in an operation which might or might not be successful. I was taken to the Queen's Hospital, and prepared for operation, but at the last moment my parents stopped all the proceedings and had me taken back home. This was in consequence of what they had heard about the power of Bile Beans, and I was started upon a course immediately. From the first I improved, and in a few days my bowels were acting normally. I gradually got stronger, and in a short time was back at work. Since then I have worked for twelve months, and have never had a trace of my old complaint. That speaks eloquently for the permanence of Bile Bean cure. I was so weak at the time I was taken to hospital for the operation that I believe I should never have lived through it."

The above sensational facts coming to the ears of a representative of a popular newspaper he at once investigated them. He found that, interesting as were the details given, there was no doubt as to their accuracy. Indeed, he discovered that the whole details had been embodied in a declaration, and sworn to before Mr. J. Seymour Price, a Birmingham Commissioner for Oaths. There can be no doubt that this incident forms one of the most striking proofs obtainable of the value of this great vegetable specific. Bile Beans cure constipation, liver ailments, headache, indigestion, female ailments, and irregularities, pimples, and skin eruptions. Obtainable from all medicine vendors at one and three-halfpence or two and ninepence per box. Avoid substitutes.

#### QUEER CHINAMEN

His left hand is the place of honour. He carries a pig instead of driving him. He whitens instead of blackens his shoes. His favourite present to a parent is a coffin. He says sixths four instead of four-sixths. He keeps out of step in walking with others. He shakes his own hands instead of his friend's.

He puts on his hat in salutation when he takes it off.

He rides with his heels instead of his toes in the stirrups.

He deems it polite to ask a casual caller's age and income.

His long nails are not a sign of dirtiness but respectability.

His visiting card is eight and sometimes thirty inches long.

He often throws away the fruit of the melon and eats the seed.

His merits often bring a title not to himself but to his ancestors.

His women-folk are often seen in trouser accompanied by men in gowns.

A Chinaman's given name comes after not before "his honoured family name."

His compass points south and he speaks of west-north instead of north-west.

He does not consider it clumsy, but courteous, to take both hands to offer a cup of tea.

## Gleanings

**TELEPHONES FOR DIVINS.**—Several up-to-date divers' suits are being experimented with. They have a telephone attachment, so that the submerged person can converse with his aids at the surface. The telephone is stated to have so far proved itself to be trustworthy, and a great improvement on the rope system of signalling.

**HOW TO TELL EVERGREENS.**—White pine: Five needles in a bundle; scales of cone thickened at the top. Scotch pine: Two bluish-green, short needles in a bundle. Austrian pine: Two long, dark green needles in a bundle. Fir: Erect cone; flat, spreading needles scattered singly. Norway spruce: Large, hanging cones; scattered needles point all ways. Hemlock: Small hanging cones; flat spray. Larch: Many needles in a cluster; fall off each year; erect cones. Red cedar: Bluish berries; sharp prickly spray.

**INCONSISTENT MAN.**—He tells funny stories about how a woman drives a horse, and steers his automobile up a telegraph pole. He is above adding postscripts to his letters, but he uses the long-distance telephone to explain what he omitted in his business communication. He can explain the wireless telegraphy system to his wife, but he cannot understand her description of a new bonnet. He loves to tell of the splendid exercise of sawing wood, but he is willing to pay another man to enjoy the exercise. He writes cards to the papers against problem plays, and swears at the ticket window if he cannot get a front seat when the ballet comes to town. He doesn't go to church on Sunday because he wants to read the paper, but through the week he is satisfied to glance at the headlines on his way down town.

**DISLAND PUBLICITY, BUT.**—“Young man,” the rising statesman said the reporter, “newspaper notoriety is exceedingly distasteful to me, but since you have asked me to give you some of the particulars of the leading events of my life I will comply. I do so, however, with great reluctance.” Here he took a typewritten sheet from a drawer in his desk and handed it to the reporter. “I suppose, of course,” he added, “you will want my portrait, and, although I dislike anything that savours of undue publicity, I can do no less than comply with your wish.” Here he took a large photograph from a pile in another drawer and gave it to the reporter. “Anecdotal matter concerning myself,” he added, “you will find in this printed leaflet, as well as particulars of my hobbies and tastes. When this appears in print you may send me 250 copies of the paper.”

**A FORCIBLE REMINDER.**—An official visitor to an asylum was surprised in the course of his inspection to find among the inmates a gentleman who complained that he was unlawfully confined there by his relatives, who wanted him money. The official took him aside and heard him lay his case very lucidly and sensibly before him. The man seemed to be as remarkably clear-headed that the commissioner made notes of the case and promised that he should not be long detained. He spent some hours in making an inspection of the institution, after which he again saw the unfortunate gentleman and expressed the deepest sympathy with him, confined there sane among the mad. “But do not fear,” he added, “your case will be gone into at once, and your discharge will be speedy. There is no doubt about your sanity.” “Thank you! A thousand times thank you!” said the gentleman. “You will never regret the trouble you are taking!” They walked to the gate together, chattering as they went, and shook hands cordially at parting. The commissioner was passing through the gate, when he was violently kicked from behind and prostrated in the mud. He rose with difficulty, and, supporting himself by the gate, gasped. “What—what was that for?” “That,” said the gentleman, now grinning through the bars, “that's lest you forget!”

**A BUTTERFLY FARM.**—Near Scarborough a farm exists for rearing moths and butterflies. Half an acre of land has been planted with trees and shrubs for the purpose. In their season the stock of caterpillars is twenty thousand. From thirty to forty thousand preserved insects are kept in reserve, so that butterflies and moths can be supplied irrespective of the time of year.

**JAPANESE CUSTOMS.**—A writer, describing scenes on Japanese railways, says when a native lady enters the carriage she alights her feet from her tiny shoes, stands upon the seat, and then sits demurely with her feet doubled beneath her. A moment later she lights a cigarette, or her little pipe, which holds just tobacco enough to produce two good whiffs of smoke. All Japanese people sit with their feet upon the seat of the car, and not as Europeans do. When the ticket collector—attired in a blue uniform—enters the carriage he removes his cap, and twice bows politely. He repeats the bow as he comes to each passenger to collect the tickets from them.

**LONG-REIGNING POPES.**—Leo XIII. has just celebrated his Papal Jubilee, having held the office for more than a quarter of a century. Only two Popes have reigned so long, namely, St. Peter, the first Pope, and Pius IX., the immediate predecessor of Leo XIII. It was Pius IX. who destroyed the tradition that no Pope would continue in the office so long as St. Peter—twenty-five years. Pius IX. was Pope for thirty-two years. Besides Pius IX. and the present Holy Father, the following have filled the pontifical chair for the longest periods:—Pius VI., 24 years; Adrian I., 24 years; Pius VII., 23 years; St. Sylvester I., 23 years; Alexander III., 22 years; Clement IX., 21 years.

**INHALED THROUGH A TUBE.**—So many old-pipes made of clay, wood and metal have been found in England, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland and France that archaeologists are inclined to think the ancients may have smoked. The belief receives some colour from passages in ancient authors. Herodotus remarks that the inhabitants of the Araxes Islands, supposed to be the modern Volga, “were wont to throw piles of fruit on a fire and then to inhale the vapour, with the result that they became as drunk as ever the Greeks became after drinking wine, and the more fruit they threw on the fire the more drunk they became.” Pomponius Mela talks in a similar strain of certain Thracian tribes. Pliny asserts that the vapour of plants was used to cure diseases, and says that in some instances it was even inhaled through a tube.

**TREATMENT THROUGH THE EYES.**—The sweater the rose is the better, for the fragrance of this flower is of such peculiar delicacy that it neither clogs upon the nostrils nor palls upon the senses. Other flowers with heavy scent make one languid. But the rose is invigorating; and it is known now that the concentrated rose—that is, the natural smell as obtained from roses in great quantities—will certainly act upon the person as though he or she had been fanned by a breeze. The rose carist asserts that if the scent is inhaled directly from the very heart of the flower it is more beneficial to the patient than though it were inhaled at a long distance through an essence or an extract. Sleep on a pillow of roses, and when you wake up your headache will be cured. The best rose is the garden rose, as it retains its red rose scent without having lost anything by being cultivated. One of the rose treatments is through the eyes for the nervous man or woman—people who cannot see suffering, uncleanness or disorder. An unhappy combination of colours will frequently affect the nerves and produce a headache. When people are as sensitive as this they can be cured by the colour treatment, and this colour cure is now actively in operation in many places. When undergoing a severe nervous strain it is a good plan to take a rose and hold it to the nostrils; breathe deeply of the scent.

**BASELESS FEARS.**—Many intelligent persons are deterred from swallowing the seeds of berries, grapes, and other fruits lest the lodgment of these small bits of indigestibility may induce that dreadful accident appendicitis. This fear is utterly baseless since the healthy appendix is protected by a valvular arrangement which prevents even the smallest seeds from entering it. It is only after inflammation has already destroyed its normal protection that any foreign substance can gain access to it. To feel compelled to eschew all seedy berries and fruits is to seriously curtail one's dietary, and it is entirely unnecessary. In fact, the free and constant use of ripe berries and fruits of all kinds is one of the best preventives of this dangerous disease.

**HOW LIGHTNING KILLS.**—The cause of death by lightning is the sudden absorption of the electric current. When a thundercloud which is highly charged with positive electricity hangs over a certain place, the earth beneath it becomes abnormally charged with the negative electric current, and a man, animal or other object standing or lying directly beneath also partakes of the last-mentioned influence. If, while the man, animal or other object is in this condition, a discharge takes place from the cloud above the restoration of the equilibrium will be sudden and violent, or, in language that we can all understand, the negative current from the earth will rush up to join the positive cloud current, and in passing through the object which separates the two currents, if it be an animate thing, will do with such force as to almost invariably produce instant death. According to this hypothesis a person is really “struck” by the ground current, and not by the forked fury from above at all.

**TAKING THE SPIRIT OUT OF PLANCHETTE.**—Professor Ray Lankester has taken the feet from planchette in an article, in which he says that about fifty years ago “table-turning” was fashionable in London. Faraday took two stiff pieces of millboard of the size and shape of an octavo volume; he placed two glass rollers (cut rods) between the boards, and encircled the pair of boards thus separated by the glass rollers with two elastic bands so as to give a light pressure and keep everything mobile but in place. When the finger-tips of each of the table-turning operators were allowed to rest on the card the upper one after a little time would slip forward on the glass-rollers, showing that though the table-turner was unconscious of it he had exercised a certain pressure. And as the mobile upper cards or boards received the pressure and moved, no movement was communicated to the table. The previously mysterious motor power of table-turning was arrested and its true nature shown.

**THAT MORSE CODE.**—A story about a party of telegraph operators of the gentler sex and a man who was the possessor of a very red nose is worth repeating. This man was an inspector for an American railroad company, and his duty was to travel from place to place and see that everything went well with the signal system, and, of course, he was thoroughly conversant with the entire business. One day while on a trip to a remote station he was compelled to wait an hour at a place where he had to change to another train. He thought it a good opportunity to get some dinner, and, going to a restaurant in the town, was given a seat at a table with a party of young ladies. On seating himself at the table one of the girls placed her knife between the tines of her fork and ticked off: “Girls, get on to the old fellow with the red head-light!” Of course, the “old fellow” with the “red headlight” understood the message as well as any of them, but he gave no sign until he felt that all eyes were centred on his nose, when, without looking up, he calmly took his knife and fork and ticked off: “Are you all on to him, girls?” He was soon in the sole possession of the place, for the girls did not stop for dessert.

## Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication but as a guarantee of good faith.

**BACCHUS.**—Common red wine is called "vin ordinaire" in France.

**JOURNAL.**—Much of the sulphur in general use comes from Sicily.

**FAITH.**—The winter in Vancouver is as a rule open and comparatively mild.

**CLAUDE.**—The uniform stamp of one penny on receipts was enacted in August, 1853.

**P. D.**—The Elementary Education Act, which created school boards, was passed in 1870.

**MISERABLE ANKLE.**—A person under twenty-one years of age cannot be sued for breach of promise.

**ONE IN DISTRESS.**—If the carrier undertook to deliver the dog safely he would be responsible.

**PRETTY MAID.**—To cure prickly heat, mix a large portion of wheat bran with either cold or luke-warm water, and use it as a bath twice or thrice a day.

**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—Ballion is properly uncoined gold and silver in the mass, but the word is sometimes also used to denote gold and silver coin.

**BUZANO, OMA.**—Rain takes up from the air, as it falls, a little carbonic acid and ammonia, and it is this, it is said, which makes it better for plants than pump water.

**ST. VITUS.**—Vitus was a Sicilian martyred by Diocletian, A.D. 303-313. He was made one of the fourteen "helpers in need" in the Roman Catholic calendar and canonised. Persons suffering from nervous diseases prayed to him, and St. Vitus's dance was originally a procession of men and women jumping along the roads to his chapels.

**CHRISTINE.**—You can renovate those little illusion veils when they have lost their crispness by dipping them in weak mucilage and water and stretching and pinning them to dry in the way lace curtains are done. Of course, the veils are so cheap and so much more apt to tear than to get limp, that one would never want to do this in town.

**GARNET.**—Garnets were called by the ancients carbuncles; and when cut round and flat, like a drop of tallow, they are still called by the same name. The dark, red garnet is something like the ruby; but there are also black, brown, green, and yellow garnets. The most prized are the red and black. The best come from Ceylon, Pegu, and Greenland.

**UNORTHODOX.**—Rapid strides are being made in funeral reform, and the vulgar habit of wearing "deep" mourning is undoubtedly on the decrease. Whether we shall ever arrive at a stage when outward and visible signs of mourning are altogether dispensed with is more than doubtful, but we are unquestionably learning to have the courage of our opinions in these matters.

**MARGUERITE.**—The four kings in playing cards were originally David, Alexander, Caesar, and Charlemagne, representing the four great monarchies, while the queens were Argive, Esther, Judith, and Pallas, typical of birth, piety, fortitude, and wisdom. Argive being an anagram of Regina. The knaves were either knights or servants to the kings, but which is uncertain, though the former conjecture is the more probable, from the fact that on cards of an early date appear the names of knights.

**DOLLY.**—You have no right to remove the turf laid down by you during your tenancy.

**L. T.**—Get some bran, wet it, and when it is almost dry, rub your sampler with it until the dirt disappears.

**ONE IN TROUBLE.**—The rent cannot be recovered in the police-court. The landlord must go to the county-court.

**DOGO.**—My advice is that as soon as a money-lender demands a fee for expenses or inquiries he should be dropped. He does not mean honest business. If he did, the interest he charges would cover all expenses.

**NEED.**—Do you mean is there a special food for goldfish? Yes, finely-minced raw beef or fish dropped into the water occasionally, mere crumbs of either; a few crumbs of sponge biscuit may be given occasionally.

**HIGHLANDER.**—You are rather under standard height, though over chest measurement, indicating a vigorous constitution, but I cannot say where you are likely to succeed in your application. It will have to be a try all round.

**PERPLEXED.**—I cannot see that you have much to complain of. You do not appear to have been very shabbily treated, and you are both morally and legally bound to pay the debt. The Statute of Limitations does not apply in such a case.

**JACKO.**—It would be altogether against the spirit of the King's Regulations for anyone not in the King's service to wear a military uniform or bear military rank. If the attention of the War Office is drawn to the matter it will very soon be rectified.

**NOT QUITE SWAN.**—Swans are never otherwise designated than as male and female, although it would be quite proper to speak of them as cock and hen; the young are cygnets, from the Latin name of the natural order to which the swan belongs.

**TEPPICHORE.**—A dancing master simply giving dancing lessons in his own house does not need a licence. A licence is required for any house, room, garden, or other place "kept or used for public dancing, singing, music, or public entertainment of a like kind." The authority is the Public Health Act Amendment Act.

**BRITON.**—The British loss in the Russo-Turkish (better known as Crimean) War was about 3,500 killed or died of wounds, 4,244 died of cholera, of other diseases 16,000 men total, 24,000 killed or died; 2,875 disabled. The war added £41,031,000 to the National Debt. The French lost about 63,000 men. Russia about half a million.

**ANXIOUS LOTTE.**—To take grease out of white marble, apply a little pile of whiting or fuller's earth saturated with benzine, and allow it to stand some time. Or apply a mixture of two parts washing soda, one part pumice stone, and one part chalk, all first finely powdered and made into a paste with water; rub well over the marble, and finally wash off with soap and water.

**IN A FIX.**—Let the girl write at once, stating that on reconsideration of the matter she finds she really does not require the book and cannot pay for it. The publishers will therefore oblige her by cancelling the order their canvasser badgered her into signing against her conviction. That is enough; but she must resolutely refuse to accept delivery and need not heed threats addressed to her.

**PLUSH.**—Do not attempt to clean your plush. If it is a good one, give it to a cleaner. The way it is done is by rubbing it with a piece of plush just damped, then, when the dirt is removed, facing up the pile again by passing the plush so as to let a little steam through it from the back, or laying a bit of damp cloth upon the back and putting a hot iron on cloth upon the back and putting a hot iron on cloth downwards.

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ONE.—Debts contracted by a minor to be recovered on his coming of age.

MOTHER.—The waterproof coat which has stiffened cannot be softened again. It is for further use.

CHIEF.—A cheque is not a legal tender, a creditor is not obliged to take a cheque in payment of the debt.

DAY.—The length of the mean solar day is twenty-four hours, and of the mean sidereal day a twenty-three hours fifty-six minutes four seconds.

RAILWAYS.—There are quite a number of State and London offices. You will find the complete list in Whitaker's Almanack.

BATH.—A cold bath every morning is good for preserving the body in health and vigour; some people cannot stand the shock, and such is its injurious. It is in the brisk rubbing after the bath that the chief good lies, it sets up a healthy action in the skin.

UNCERTAINTY.—A parent is at liberty to send his child to a private school. If the Local Board is dissatisfied with the quality of the teaching at that school, the parent may be summoned under the Education Act, and would be for the magistrate to decide if the child was or was not under efficient instruction. If not, the parent would be at liberty to choose another private school under similar conditions.

DESTITUTE TO KNOW.—1. Any acknowledgement of a debt, and a new promise to pay it, made either within the period or afterwards, if in writing, as, for instance, in a note to a creditor, renewa the debt from time of the payment, and makes it good again for the legal period, counted from the new promise. 2. A part payment makes a debt good again, as in the case of a new promise.

BOB'S SWEETHEART.—A deduction has always been made from the soldier's pay for meat and bread.

E. CRISPIN.—Anent means about, concerning; also, over, against, opposite to. The word is Scotch.

DOWNTFUL ONE.—The "Ei" in Eiffel is pronounced like "I" in German; but the French pronounce the name as if spelt "Aveil."

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—Let the lad, if he is a stout fellow, engage as an ordinary seaman. His outfit will cost between £8 and £9. Of course, he is not too old to be apprenticed, if that is preferred.

WORRIED ANNIE.—I very much regret to say I do not think there is any means of preventing the hairs from coming out of your goat-skin rug (which cannot have been properly preserved) or of eradicating the insects from your furniture. If I am to understand that there are moths under the cloth the only cure for that is to take off the cloth and renew the stuffing.

CURIOSITY.—The bandmaster and bandsmen of a regimental band are on the regimental strength, and draw daily pay. To attract competent men it is necessary, however, for the officers to form a band fund, out of which the bandmaster and men are paid a considerable addition to their nominal pay. Receipts from engagements to play in public go to the band fund, after payment of expenses.

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DURBO.—Santiago is the capital of Chili; Valparaiso is the chief seaport.

DORA.—It is proper for a gentleman to offer his arm to any lady whom he may be escorting at night, and also to give her the wall.

MOLLY.—The jacket can be renewed only by being sent to the dyer to be dipped. Any cobbling process would in all probability result in making the "greenness" more apparent.

SALLY.—The last date at which bread was at a shilling the quarton loaf was in 1814. It was 11d. in November, 1846, and May, 1847. Since then 10d. has been the highest price.

CATHOLIC.—The Greek Catholic and Syrian Catholic Churches acknowledge the Pope, though they are said in some particulars to approach more nearly to the Greek than the Roman Church.

STUDIOUS.—Some persons three and four times twenty years of age have taught themselves Greek and Latin and other languages; but for every one of that kind there are hundreds who cannot master any language, even with all the assistance a teacher can give.

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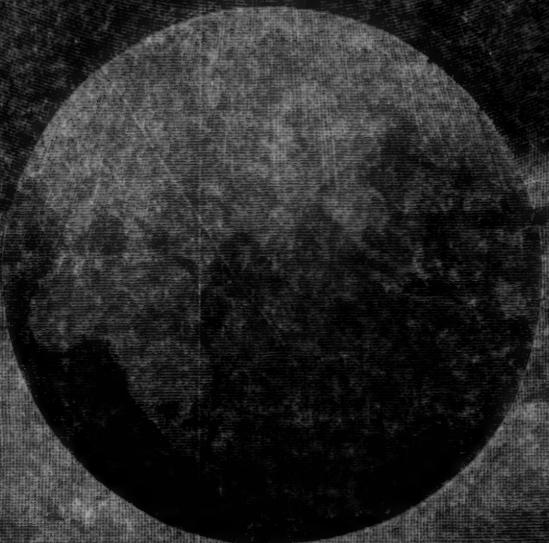
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